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ver "Over There"

By

"Wing Adjutant"

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R. W. S. Drummond
23/12/18. R.A.F.

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Over "Over There"

By

"Wing Adjutant"

Author of "The Royal Flying Corps in the War,"
"Plane Tales from the Skies"

Cassell and Company, Ltd
London, New York, Toronto and Melbourne

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To

MY WIFE

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INTRODUCTION

In laying this, my third volume of stories of the Royal Air Force, before the public I have to acknowledge the permission of the following papers to reproduce articles which have appeared serially in their columns: *Daily Mail, Birmingham Daily Mail, Evening News, Sunday Herald, Sunday Times, Westminster Gazette, Daily Telegraph, Daily Chronicle, Star.*

As in the case of "Plane Tales from the Skies," all the incidents related are founded on fact, and though names are only mentioned in one or two isolated cases, many people will recognise the heroes of certain stories.

By the time this book appears the author will be again on active service. In due course he hopes to be able to write the account of his further experiences and those of others in fresh theatres of war.

WILFRED T. BLAKE
(*Major*)

Manor College,
Lillington.
9–10–18

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OVER "OVER THERE"

1

HEROES ALL

THE OBSERVERS OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE

OBSERVERS in the Royal Air Force have not been generally given the credit which is their due. Public opinion centres round the pilot, and it is only the pilots and other officers of the R.A.F. who really appreciate the unfortunate observer and give him due credit for the very gallant work which has been performed. The man who is in the know realises that the unfortunate observer has a very thin time on many occasions, for he is absolutely at the mercy of the pilot, and no one knows this more than the passenger. Should the pilot become incapacitated through wounds the observer must sit still and await the end, knowing that he is helpless and longing for a chance to save himself and the machine. At present this danger

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is being rectified by fitting dual control to many machines, so that in the event of a casualty occurring the observer may still have a chance of landing the aeroplane. Constant flying and continually watching the movements of the pilot acquaint him with the correct movements of controls, and in many recent cases the observer has managed to land his machine safely after the pilot has been wounded, and so save the lives of his companion and himself, and also prevent the aeroplane falling into the hands of the Hun.

A case in point occurred recently.

During a raid the machine was very badly shot about, the pilot's control lever was broken, and several wires and cables severed. The 'plane fell into a nose dive and commenced spinning to earth whilst the pilot sat helpless. This was the observer's chance. Hastily he took the spare lever and fitted it into its socket, placed the rudder in a neutral position, pushed forward the joy-stick, and waited for results. In a moment the machine ceased spinning and came into a steep glide. Gradually the observer flattened out, obeying the motions of the pilot, who turned round and directed his companion, until the aeroplane was in

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a normal position, heading back to the lines.

But the work did not end there. When the Boche realised that his prey was escaping he again came to the attack, diving at the two-seater. Positions were indeed reversed. The pilot became the gunner, whilst his observer manœuvred the aeroplane. When the Hun was at close quarters the observer pushed down the nose of the machine and then pulled her over in a clumsy loop. Amateurish though the movement was, it proved sufficient, for the pilot was able to get in a burst from his gun; the Hun staggered, fell into a spin, and finally the planes collapsed, and the remains fell swiftly to earth.

The rest of the journey was uneventful, for not only did the observer carry the machine over the lines, but flew her back to the right aerodrome and landed without any damage.

For sheer coolness and pluck the following is typical of the class of man who observes in the R.A.F.

Sec.-Lieut. E. I. Wells was on observation duty in a two-seater on the German side of the lines when the machine was shelled heavily by " Archie." A stray bullet pierced

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the petrol tank, and with a few splutters the engine gave out. The pilot looked round, shrugged his shoulders, and pushed down the nose of the aeroplane so that they might try to glide home. They had plenty of height, and if they were not molested it would be an easy matter to glide over the lines. Unfortunately "Archie" had not finished with them, and a moment later a fresh bombardment commenced on the unhappy machine. Without the help of the engine it was impossible to dodge the brown puffs of the bursting high explosive which crept nearer and nearer, until at last a burst right under the plane caused the machine to bank over and fall into a steep side-slip. Vainly the pilot tried to recover control, but all his efforts were useless, for the burst had carried an aileron away, and he could not hope to bring the 'bus on to an even keel. The observer appreciated the situation, and knew that only one thing could save them. Without a moment's hesitation he stepped out of his seat on to the plane and began slowly to climb along the surface, holding on to the struts and wires as the machine fell swiftly earthwards. At last he reached the furthest limit, where the missing aileron had been.

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Then he grasped the strut firmly in his arms, twined his legs around the wires, and leaned out into space. Slowly his weight began to have the desired effect, and little by little the wing dropped until the aeroplane was once more in a horizontal position, and the pilot was able to head her for home.

A great deal of height had been lost during the fall, and the lines were still some distance off, but the observer remained in his position, sitting on the main spar and maintaining the machine's equilibrium until the cheers from the ground told that safety was reached, and the aeroplane was landed with little damage well behind the trenches.

Sergt. Mottershead, who won the V.C. for his great gallantry in saving his observer when the machine caught fire in the air, could not have achieved his object had it not been for the pluck of Lieut. Gower, the observer.

This officer, during the whole dive of the stricken, flaming fighter, stood up in his seat and played the fire-extinguisher on the flames and on the pilot, who was striving so hard to save both their lives. He succeeded in keeping the fire under long enough for the aeroplane to be landed, and had immediate aid been available no doubt the pilot

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would not have succumbed to his injuries, but unfortunately help was not close at hand, and it was some time before Mottershead could be removed from the remains, whilst Gower lay close by in a faint.

Another case when the pilot won the V.C. and his observer displayed great courage was when Lieut. McCleod side-slipped his burning machine to earth whilst he stood on the plane and controlled its fall. During all that blazing glide to earth the observer, Lieut. A. W. Hammond, remained in his seat working his gun. Despite the flames he stuck to his post and fought the Huns who endeavoured to finish off the stricken machine. As each shape appeared through the blur of fire and smoke he loosed off burst after burst, and succeeded in keeping his foes at bay until ground was reached, when he succumbed to his six wounds and fainted.

Early in the war, when observers trained to the part were scarce, pilots sometimes, when on an important mission, carried other pilots as observers. It was on one of these occasions that a fight with a Boche took place, and the enemy was seen to dive steeply to earth and land safely in a large field in a lonely spot miles behind the trenches.

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The British fighter immediately planed down to put the finishing touches to the job, but the observer noticed that no one had yet left the Hun machine, and he therefore suspected a ruse. He conveyed his idea to the pilot, and for a time they circled round and round awaiting events. Nothing happened, so at length the pilot decided to land in the same field and investigate matters. After making sure that no troops were in the vicinity, the aeroplane was landed at the far end of the field and slowly taxied up to the silent Hun, who was kept carefully covered by the machine-gun in case of any tricks developing. Nothing happened, and the fighter halted beside the German machine. The pilot was nowhere to be seen, so the British observer determined to look into matters.

Armed with his revolver, he carefully approached the Boche, and mounted on the plane. Then all was clear to him. There lay the pilot, fallen to the floor of the nacelle, to all appearances dead. Calling his companion to his assistance, the observer soon removed the body, which showed signs of coming to life. A hasty examination revealed the fact that the Hun was badly hit in the arm and had probably fainted from loss of

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blood, after landing in the field. He was hastily bandaged up, and came to, appearing surprised that he was not at once killed. Nothing more could well be done for him, so the two officers then turned their attention to his machine. This was quite undamaged, and it was only a matter of a few moments for the ex-observer to climb into the cockpit whilst his companion swung the propeller, after which both aeroplanes left the ground and headed for home, the machine with the red, white and blue rings keeping close to the craft with the Iron Cross and escorting it back to the aerodrome in safety.

Ingenuity has saved many valuable lives and aeroplanes, and Lieut. Scott added one more to the many brainy ideas which have become a feature of aerial warfare.

During a reconnaissance the petrol tank of the machine in which he was observer was pierced by a machine-gun bullet from the ground. The engine at once commenced to splutter and finally gave out. There was little real danger in this, for they had only just crossed the lines, and though flying comparatively low, had sufficient altitude in which to turn and glide back to safety.

This, however, was against the observer's inclination, for the day's work had not been

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commenced, and he hated returning with nothing done. He decided to step out and investigate matters. Accordingly he left his seat and edged his way across the plane until he could get at the petrol tank. A glance sufficed to show him the trouble; a ragged hole near the top of the tank, not low enough to permit the escape of petrol, but large enough to cause the loss of pressure necessary to carry fuel to the engine. He could not reach the rent to plug it, so he returned to his seat, having already thought of an idea.

A third time he edged across the plane, this time carrying the spare control-lever which he had taken from its socket. About this he wrapped his flying cap and then, holding on to a strut with one hand, he reached out and rammed the plug home in the rent.

The pilot pumped furiously at the pressure and noticed his gauge rise. He then pushed the nose of the machine down until the wind whistled through the wires, and the pressure of air caused the propeller to revolve. A moment later the roar of the engine rewarded the observer, the machine flattened out, swung round, and then *they carried out their reconnaissance.*

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A risky thing to do perhaps, but risks are not counted when results are wanted, in the Royal Air Force.

Both McCudden and Bishop commenced their aerial careers as observers, the former as a mechanic-gunner, the latter as an officer. It is probably due to the time spent as an observer that Bishop owes much of his subsequent success, though it went badly against the grain at the time. Someone in authority had turned down his application to become a pilot as he was not considered the right type, he was not fit enough,or for some other reason. Though Bishop chafed at the restraint and what he considered the waste of time spent on an aerodrome on Salisbury Plain learning the art of observation, he took advantage of his training to become a first-rate shot, and this, together with the aerial experience he gained as an observer, undoubtedly contributed greatly to his enormous successes later.

Many accounts have been written of the thoughts and feelings of a pilot whilst undergoing a heavy strafe by "Archie," but little has been said of the observer. Whilst the bursts are dotting the sky and gradually creeping closer and closer, the pilot, though undoubtedly in danger, has much to occupy

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his mind. He continually has to twist and manœuvre the aeroplane to dodge shrapnel and high explosive, he has to watch his instruments to see that all is well with engine and machine, he has to keep careful check of his position. Thus his mind is kept busy, and he does not dwell on the danger of the storm.

It is otherwise with the observer. That worthy has to sit tight and do nothing. He can only watch the bursts and wonder how long before the machine is hit. If he has confidence in the pilot things are not so bad, but if, as sometimes happens, the observer has more air experience than the pilot, he has to sit and mutely curse the man in front of him, whilst thousands of better manœuvres constantly rise to his mind, and every trifling error on the part of the pilot appears to him magnified a hundred-fold. Not until the storm ceases can he breathe freely and allow his confidence to return.

It is a noticeable thing that pilots who have gone through the mill previously themselves are much more considerate to their unfortunate observers than those who have graduated without the preliminary weeks in the air in France.

Marvellous shooting is a quality much

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valued by the pilot when the observer possesses that gift.

On one occasion a fighting two-seater was attacked by eight German scouts whilst returning from a patrol. Each of the scouts was more than a match for the slower, clumsier fighter, but nevertheless the pilot turned and charged at his foes. Escape was hopeless, and his one wish was to die fighting. In the first rush, one scout went down in flames; then the observer sent a second crashing to earth in pieces, and the pilot forced a third to leave the combat with its pilot evidently wounded.

Such luck could not last, and a shot pierced the petrol tank whilst the British machine was still far from safety, though within gliding distance of the trenches. The engine promptly stopped and the pilot pointed the aeroplane for home, though safety seemed a forlorn hope. Then came the observer's opportunity.

The odds were still five to one, five scouts to one two-seater, and that two-seater but a lame duck. Two of the scouts rushed at their prey, firing into the rear of the machine as they approached. The observer reserved his fire until sure of a hit, then pumped out two bursts, first at one scout, then at the

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other. The planes collapsed on the one which first received the shower of lead, and it whirled earthwards, a tangled mass of wood, fabric and iron. The second scout wavered unsteadily, then turned and rejoined its comrades.

One after another the four scouts attacked; no sooner had the fire from one ceased than the next took up the devil's tattoo. As each came the observer met it with a deadly fire, and each Hun went back to consider the holes in his planes, and the splintered woodwork. The British gunnery seemed uncanny, and the Boches drew off to consider things. And all the time the trenches became closer and closer.

Then the scouts split into two parties, and charged the fighter from each side. Two short bursts from one side and the observer swung round his gun. Another burst as the scouts swept by, and another moment's respite.

Again the Huns charged from all directions, and again the observer poured lead into each machine. The last to come over his sights had waited too long, and let its comrades attack first. This received the full benefit of a long burst, and the observer's heart was cheered by the sight

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of smoke and flames as the burning scout spun rapidly down.

Suddenly, without warning, the remaining Huns turned tail and bolted. The observer looked round and saw a distant formation of British machines and knew that they were saved. His marvellous gunnery had retrieved the situation.

Unfortunately, despite the bravery of observers and pilots, things do not always turn out so well.

Lieut. Mosby, whilst on artillery patrol, was attacked by three enemy machines. Two of these dived at the front of the two-seater, one at the rear. The one which dived towards him he instantly engaged, firing a long burst as soon as it was within range. The flames from his tracer bullets showed that his shots took effect, and the Hun drew off. He then turned to assist the pilot, but no sooner had he swung round the gun than he was hit in the stomach and at the same moment he saw the pilot fall forward with a bullet through his head. The machine promptly fell into a dive, carrying the dead pilot and wounded observer to their doom.

Despite the pain of his wound, Mosby stooped down and fitted the dual control,

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pulling the machine out of its dive after a drop of over two thousand feet.

No sooner had he regained control than the three Huns came at him again. Again he drove them off and continued his journey. Once more the Huns attacked and a second bullet hit him in the stomach. For a moment he fainted, and the machine commenced to spin, but he recovered, and again regained control.

Burst after burst he fired at his foes, driving them off each time they returned to the attack. In this way he reached safety. Despite his wounds he kept the enemy at bay and crossed the lines. Gritting his teeth he held on. If he must die he would at least die as near home as possible. At last he came to the aerodrome. Through a red mist he saw the familiar hangars, throttled back the engine, descended in a long glide, and landed.

Tender hands took him from the machine, and placed him in the ambulance. He held on to the last, and fell into unconsciousness only when the hospital was reached.

One more leaf was added to the wreath being woven by the observers of the Royal Air Force.

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2

SAVED BY A TANK

TANKS and aeroplanes do not often come to the same spot at the same moment, but on this occasion it so happened that as the heavily-armoured leviathans ambled ponderously over the shell-pocked ground the airily-fantastic aeroplanes swept by many thousands of feet over head.

The pilot of the scout was busily occupied in attacking a Hun, who, after the first burst, decided that such a high altitude was unhealthy and dived earthwards, flattening out only a few hundred feet above the second line of the German trenches. His aggressor followed him in his dive through space, and flattened out a little sooner, after which he poured in a stream of lead, saw his opponent go down in flames, and prepared to rise again and join in the dog-fight which was going on. Unfortunately, he had reckoned without the machine-guns which infested the ground, and which even then were being dealt with by the tanks. Three of these guns found

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time to concentrate their attention on the scout, and fired so well that the engine was damaged, and in the resulting crash the pilot's leg was broken.

A few minutes later the Huns above broke off the fight and left the British machines in possession of the air. One of these had witnessed the fall of the scout near the support trenches of the German lines, and descended to look into matters. As a preliminary he fired a drum of ammunition into the machine-gun battery which had brought down his friend, silencing it and leaving an advancing tank free to proceed elsewhere. Then he went to the next battery, and from the height of only fifty feet commenced to repeat the process. This time his luck deserted him, for he in his turn was also brought down by means of a damaged engine, but he landed safely and dropped to earth to think matters over.

Whilst on the ground he saw the wreckage of the first scout close beside him, and saw the wounded pilot stirring in the ruins of his seat. Luckily the machine-guns had been practically destroyed by this time, and the tanks were pausing for breath, so the pilot was able to go to the assistance of his friend, pull him from the damaged machine and

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place him in a shell hole, where he was comparatively safe.

And then a tank rumbled up. This was the pilot's chance. He attracted the attention of the grimy crew, and besought their assistance. The tank, having finished temporarily its career of destruction, was graciously pleased to assist its brother of the air. In a moment the wounded man was lifted into the reeking interior, the pilot followed suit, then the monster swung round on its haunches and wallowed back to the safety of a dressing station in the most approved manner of a Red Cross ambulance.

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3

WIPED OUT

NINE Fokker biplanes had been encountered in the morning. Out of these the patrol of British scouts had shot down five; three had burst into flames, the planes had collapsed from another, and the last had spun down out of control. Now, the same evening the patrol was out again, looking for the remnant of the formation which had been so badly cut up in the morning. The pilots were anxious to meet their foes once more, for they had fought gamely, especially the leader, and though outmatched had carried on whilst any hope remained. It was almost as if the first round had been fought, and the combatants had retired to get their second wind, mutually agreeing to meet later to finish off the combat.

Glancing above him the patrol leader saw the approach of the Huns. Four Fokkers approached flying in perfect style, waiting for a chance to attack. The leader noticed that the machine which led the Huns was the same as that which had fought so well

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in the morning. Without waiting for more he pushed up the nose of his machine and rose to the attack. For a moment the two parties paused as though to let the affair be settled between their leaders, but when the first "Rat-tat-tat" of a machine-gun burst on the evening air both parties rushed at each other, one side determined to wipe out the defeat of the morning, the other to complete their conquest. It was to be a fight to a finish.

The British leader reserved his fire until he was within a few yards of his opponent. Though a straggling long-range fire burst about him, he carried straight on, steadily bearing down on the target. Then, at last, he pressed the trigger of his gun, and a storm of lead broke upon the German. Quickly the Boche swung round in an S-turn, coming round on the tail of his foe, but before his shots could take effect the British pilot dived, pulled his machine over in a loop, and as he flattened out caught the Hun fairly amidships. The Fokker staggered and stalled; evidently the pilot was hit. Then the leader closed with his enemy and concentrated his fire upon him. A sheet of flame rushed from the petrol tank, the machine plunged abruptly downwards, then

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the planes collapsed, and still blazing, the remains crashed to earth.

Meanwhile the other machines had not been idle. As the leader turned to the help of his companions he saw a second Fokker go down in flames. Then an incident occurred which surprised him. As the burning scout fell the pilot jumped overboard. A parachute unfolded, and the Hun sailed safely to earth. This was the first time the leader had seen parachutes used in this way, and possibly that explains the fact that he was caught unawares, being aroused from his surprised gazing by a few bullets dangerously close to his petrol tank. He swung round, but even as he prepared to fire at his aggressor, one of the patrol dashed in and a third Hun fell in flames.

One Boche remained. Though he had witnessed the fate of his comrades he did not turn and flee. He rushed madly at the bunch of his foes firing wildly at every thing which crossed his path, and scoring hits on two of the British machines. Then the fire of three guns caught him at once. The interplane struts broke into splinters, the planes collapsed, and whirling madly, the Fokker fell to join its companions below.

The patrol was wiped out.

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4

INTO GERMANY

At twilight the big bombers were brought out of the hangars to be overhauled before proceeding on their long night-raid into Germany.

In the half-light, with the many mechanics working on them, they resembled some huge birds resting after a flight, too tired to worry about the tiny ants which interfered with their plumage. The fitters who poured petrol and oil into the capacious tanks might have been pipits feeding many overgrown young cuckoos. Later the cuckoos would turn into hawks, carrying huge loads of bombs in their talons, devastating the great cities of the Rhine valley.

One by one the engines were run up and tested, the rigging checked and pronounced correct, guns fitted, belts of ammunition stored in the fuselage beside the seats of pilots and observers, and lastly mighty bombs were wheeled up on trolleys and fixed, a certain number beneath the planes of each

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machine, where they would rest safely until released by the pressure on a lever, when, at the pilot's will, death and destruction would be dropped on Germany.

Before darkness had set in the officers appeared, walking two and two to their aeroplanes, carrying maps, fully acquainted with what was before them, and determined to drop their bombs where they would do most damage. Their instructions had only been issued a few minutes previously, after the meal which had been specially prepared to sustain them on their long flight. Some of them carried thermos flasks filled with warm drinks, for the air is cold at great heights, even in the summer.

Then the giants commenced to leave the aerodrome, lumbering over the ground and rising heavily into the air, like over-gorged birds. The leader of the raid was the last to leave the ground, for he wished to be certain of the number of machines which started.

Below, the outlines of the country could be faintly distinguished, brooks and ponds shimmering in the darkness and woods showing as darker spots in the surrounding gloom. Each pilot could dimly discern the form of the machine immediately in front of him, and knew that the escort was circling

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above and around him, looking for any possible source of danger from the air.

Minutes sped by and turned into hours, and still the huge wedge flew eastwards. At last a light shone out from the leader's machine; the objective was near, and each pilot must prepare for action. Guns were fingered, ammunition belts loosened, bombs were fused. Imperceptibly each man braced up his mind and prepared for what was to come. Though they had flown in silence so far, the immunity could not be expected to continue; "Archie" would soon commence to strafe.

In front of them could be seen long pencils of light wavering hither and thither across the sky, seeking the scourge which now visited the shivering towns almost daily. Suddenly a beam, flung farther afield than the others, lighted up the leading machine, causing it to shine brilliantly in the darkness. Other searchlights followed, and soon the whole formation was covered in a maze of lanes of light. A moment later "Archie" took up the tale, and the air became an inferno of bursting shells.

A signal flamed out ahead, and each machine dived out of the following beams in order to drop its bombs. Higher in the

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air aeroplanes were already engaged in combats with the fighters sent up from neighbouring German aerodromes, the incendiary tracer bullets making faint lines of fire across the sky. A tremendous blaze of light, falling rapidly to earth, showed that first blood had been drawn, and that one aeroplane was on fire. Whether it was friend or foe no one could distinguish in the gloom, though the flames lighted up the night for many yards around.

Then out of the darkness came a muffled boom, followed in quick succession by others until the whole earth seemed to echo with the explosions of the huge bombs dropped on the town. The silvery line of the Rhine showed up plainly, and the dark streak of the bridge across which ran the railway so vital for the transport of troops from Germany to France, was easily discernible. This, together with the station, was the main objective of the raid, though it was hoped to damage the huge chemical factories engaged in manufacturing poison gas, which lay on the outskirts of the city.

In the midst of the din caused by anti-aircraft fire, machine-guns and heavy bombs, suddenly a long-sounding crash made itself heard above the noise. Even the pilots,

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deafened by the noise of their own engines, heard it, and immediately afterwards a huge sheet of flame shot upwards, and a conflagration which lighted up the whole town started on the site of the factory.

The eerie light showed up the progress of the titanic combat now in progress in the air. Individual machines circled and dived at their foes, big bombers swerved aside from the attacking scouts, their gunners getting off a burst as the smaller machines swept by, " Archie " dotted the air with puffs of cotton wool, and in the midst could be seen aeroplanes soberly going about their business, unruffled by the turmoil around them.

Several fresh fires burst out in the town below, the factories were a blazing mass, and the railway station and sidings were clearly damaged. The leader, who had been reserving his bombs in order to watch the progress of the raid, finally made for the great bridge over the river, and prepared to do his best to complete the work of destruction. Waiting for a moment when the beams of a searchlight were not shining directly on him, he dived through the flickering light, flattened out a thousand feet above the bridge, took careful aim, and released a bomb, then another, and a third, in intervals

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of a few seconds. One bomb hit the parapet of the structure, the second missed, exploding in the river, throwing a huge cloud of water into the air, and the last landed fairly in the middle of the railway track, a hundredweight of powerful explosive which tore up the rails, scattered the huge blocks of stone, and all but severed an arch of the bridge.

Then the leader shot upwards again and signalled to his flock to return, the pilots meanwhile fighting a rearguard action against the German machines. These soon tired of the fight, having no stomach for lead poured upon them in the darkness, and returned to their aerodromes, leaving the bombers to fly westwards through the night, and arrive at the aerodrome when the first grey light of dawn was appearing in the east.

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5

IN A KITE-BALLOON

THINGS were going badly in the air. Already the battery on the far side of the lines had placed some shells dangerously close to the balloon. The next shot might score a hit and both observers would have to jump for their lives and trust to their parachutes. In a way it was worse than being attacked by an aeroplane, for the very last moment at which to jump was harder to decide.

The observers were engaged in ranging a battery of heavies on to a target which was invisible to the gunners themselves, though every shot could be seen by the men in the air. One target had already been dealt with and work was proceeding on the second when *wouf* came a shell which burst, it seemed, only a few yards from the basket. Both men were blinded for a moment, but when the shock had passed away they were able to see that the envelope was damaged and that the balloon was sinking fast. Leaving the target which was being worked

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on, one of the observers sent down a call, bringing to their aid a 6-in. gun miles away. The Hun had managed to bring them down, but they would not give in without a hit back. The first shell fell a little short. Down went a correction. Then the Huns sent over a couple which burst almost on the balloon, tearing still more rents in the rapidly deflating envelope. The fight rapidly developed into a duel between the two guns, one trying to knock out the other, whilst an eye still remained in the air to see the effect of the shots, the other trying to bring down the balloon before it was itself knocked out.

Faster came the shots from both guns. The balloon fell faster, but both observers disdained to trust to their parachutes whilst the Hun was still unhurt. The shots from the British gun were falling closer and closer to the target. A few more corrections would make sure of a direct hit. At last came another burst from the Boche which completed his work. A jagged slit appeared in the envelope, and the whole affair hurtled downwards. Then the empty sausage filled with air through the speed of its descent, and for a moment shot upwards again. Earth was very close but both observers had a sight of the British shell which finished

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the affair. Plumb on the emplacement fell the mass of high explosive, and German men and German gun went upwards in the air.

It was, however, no time for cheering. The whole structure was falling again. In a moment the crash would come. It was too late to jump. The parachutes would not have time to open. Both observers left the basket, and climbed upwards in the rigging, striving to put as much between themselves and the bump as possible. They were just in time. As the basket hit the earth the envelope finally collapsed, and both men flung themselves clear to escape being buried in the folds of fabric.

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6

THE ODDS AGAINST

GERMAN scouts rarely attack except when they have the odds greatly in their favour, and even when an attack does develop they are often easily scared off. Consequently the pilot of the two-seater which was engaged on an artillery patrol was not greatly perturbed when seven Fokker biplanes dived on him out of the sky. He left off his work for a few moments, and faced the on-coming Huns. A few bursts from his gun proved sufficient, and the Huns retired to add to their forces before renewing the attack.

A little later a further interruption occurred, this time through the advent of a triplane, which, greatly daring, attacked the slower machine without waiting for assistance. On being fired at by the observer the Boche changed his mind and withdrew, leaving the machine to carry on its work of ranging some British batteries on the German guns behind the lines.

One battery was working satisfactorily,

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and the second target was being ranged on when the pilot drew the attention of his observer to an approaching cloud of Huns. The cloud divided, splitting into two parties, the larger of which, consisting of eight machines keeping above the two-seater and the other, made up of four big fighters, diving until a lower altitude was reached, when they flattened out and made straight for the British aeroplane.

Things looked serious for the occupants. They were cut off from all possibility of a swift dive for home; they were unable to climb above the faster scouts. On all sides were German machines rapidly converging on their victim.

Then the storm burst. From above and below the bullets came. Holes appeared in the planes, splinters flew from the struts, and several flaming missiles narrowly missed the petrol tank. First blood was drawn by the observer who sent an over-venturesome Hun crashing to earth in flames. This caused the others to hang back for a moment, but only for a moment; then they came on with increased determination, minded to avenge their fallen comrade. The pilot met their charge with a skilful turn, twisting aside out of harm's way, then swinging round

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and firing a long burst at the nearest of his foes. The observer also used his gun to advantage, and a minute later a Hun left the combat and floated slowly down in a wide spiral. Evidently the pilot was wounded and wished to withdraw out of further danger. Unfortunately, this could not continue for ever. Sooner or later the ammunition must give out, and then the waiting mob would make short work of the defenceless machine. The pilot realised this, and gradually edged closer and closer to the trenches, keeping a sharp lookout for the help which he thought was bound to turn up in the shape of a patrol of scouts.

Fighting every inch, the British machine withdrew little by little. And then an incident occurred which nearly proved the end of all things. A lucky shot from above hit the pilot in the arm. For a moment the machine swayed out of control, and the Hun seized his chance. A cloud of bullets literally bespattered the aeroplane from propeller to empanage, and worst of all, the pilot's other arm was hit. Down dropped the nose of the machine. Grasping the situation the observer stood up in his seat and leaned over the pilot. After the first shock the pilot recovered sufficiently to guide the course of

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the machine with his feet, but he was incapable of using the hand controls. Taking the control lever in one hand, the observer pulled the aeroplane out of its dive. Then he turned, and holding the two-seater on its course he pressed the trigger of his gun with the free hand, succeeding in driving off for a moment the following Huns. The involuntary dive had left their enemies behind, and the observer concentrated his energies on reaching the lines. Ever and again he turned and fired an erratic burst at any Boche who showed a disposition to come too close, and every minute safety crept closer.

At last the trenches were near, and the observer began to breathe again. Determined to make one last effort the Fokkers charged down from all quarters and again an inferno of fire struck the aeroplane. Neither pilot nor observer was hit, and then in the distance appeared the sight of a formation of British scouts.

The Germans also saw the formation and fled.

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7

THE SUBMARINE PATROL

In the grey light of early morning the doors of the hangars opened, and the seaplane was wheeled out. With her wings folded back to the fuselage she looked like a sleeping locust, but a few minutes sufficed to spread the planes, lock the bracing wires, and make her ready for flight. Then a mechanic ran up the engine, and as the roar died away two officers made their appearance, ready to carry out the dawn patrol. The pilot soon clambered into his seat, followed by the observer. A steam crane rattled, a hook was fixed to a loop from the centre section and the machine and crew swung upwards in the air, and were gently lowered from the quay into the smooth water of the harbour. A waiting motor-boat took the seaplane in tow until she was clear of the breakwater, then a touch of the self-starter caused the propeller to gather speed, the motor-boat sheered off, and the floats of the plane made great wakes of foam as she skimmed over

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the surface. She seemed to leap from the waves and sped out to sea, over the breakwater, bound for the fishing grounds.

It was not ordinary fishing she was out for. The fish were German submarines, the bait innocent looking mystery ships, the hook a two hundred and fifty pound bomb.

When about ten miles from the coast, and nearing the spot where a Hun had been operating recently, the observer received a wireless message from the base stating that information had just been received that the submarine had been sighted at—here followed a map reference—and that every effort was to be made to find her. The pilot needed no more. Glancing at his map he swung round the plane, opened out the powerful engine, and raced for the spot. He did not fly at a great altitude, only a few hundred feet above the surface of the waters, but all the time his eyes were searching the sea for a shadow, a tell-tale patch of oil or the thin wake of a periscope.

As they neared the spot where the U-boat had been seen a patrol boat was noticed cruising about in the vicinity. The observer picked up a lamp and asked for information, but no news other than that already received

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could be given, and the seaplane continued her patrol. Then four small sailing trawlers were sighted—innocent-looking craft crawling along, their brown sails flapping in the light breeze. Ideal targets for a submarine one might think, but the Hun who attacked these sleepy vessels at close range, hoping to obtain an easy victim, would probably receive a more enthusiastic reception than he wished from the guns concealed among the gear of the boats.

Once the observer noticed a patch of oil on the water, and drew the pilot's attention to it. He looked at a special chart, and shook his head. It was a stationary patch which had showed for months, as the bubbles of oil still oozed up from a U-boat which had met its fate at that spot. These patches are frequent, and are well known. Each marks the grave of a submarine.

Hour after hour the seaplane cruised over her beat. Every yard of water was watched, every suspicious shadow was investigated, but no U-boat appeared to give the observer the chance to release the load of explosive that he longed to drop. Two hours went by, then three. Wireless messages began to come through asking what luck they had had. A little later a message

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arrived to say that the relief 'plane had started, that it was time to return.

Reluctantly the pilot set a course for home. He had been out for nearly four hours in the early morning, was chilled through and hungry, but he hated leaving the patrol to another man who might be favoured with a glimpse of the hunted Hun. And then his chance came.

A long dark shadow appeared on the waters some quarter of a mile away. It rapidly grew more and more distinct as the machine raced to meet it, and finally the periscope of a submarine emerged just as the seaplane arrived overhead. Evidently it was sighted, for the U-boat commenced to submerge at once. But she was too late. As the pilot swung round into the wind the observer pulled over the fusing lever, touched the screws of his bomb sight, and then, when the long form came in line with the sight, he quickly jerked over a lever. The bomb fell fairly behind the conning tower. A fountain of water shot upwards, and then the submarine sank from sight. A stream of bubbles came to the surface, and slowly an iridescent stain spread over the waves, growing larger and larger as fresh oily bubbles arose. None of the crew

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appeared on the surface; apparently the concussion had killed them.

As the pilot turned to congratulate his companion that worthy was already busy sending out the joyful news on his wireless, and as the relief seaplane hove in sight the pilot had no compunction in turning landwards and making all haste for the existent breakfast, which was of far more importance than a non-existent U-boat.

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8

INTO A HORNETS' NEST

HIGH in the clouds the bombing formation sped eastwards into Hunland. As it dodged in and out of the fleecy white layers of vapour the pilot, who brought up the rear of the formation, had great difficulty in keeping his station, and when, after a flight of nearly half-an-hour's duration in a wet, blinding cloud he emerged again into the sunlight, he was not very surprised to find that he had altogether lost sight of the rest of the machines. Probably they were already hidden in the next cloud, so he followed into the damp mass, but when this gave way again to the open air and he still could not see his fellows, he thought it time to give up the search as hopeless and return to the aerodrome. A raid into the depths of the enemy's country all alone was not to be thought of with his little experience.

All this time the aeroplane had been flying east into German territory, so the pilot thought that if he turned his machine

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and flew west he would eventually cross the lines and find his aerodrome. The land below him was strangely unfamiliar, and he could not ascertain his position from the map. The only thing to do was to steer by compass until he crossed the trenches. Accordingly he swung round and again disappeared into the clouds. They at least had the merit of hiding him from anti-aircraft fire, and protecting him from any prowling Hun patrols who might be tempted by his weakness to attack.

For an hour he flew in and out of the clouds, sometimes catching a fleeting glimpse of the earth through a gap in the vapour, often flying for long periods in a bewildering blanket of cotton wool. He did not realise that the wind had changed and was not with him as he thought; consequently, when he had carried on his course for nearly two hours without sighting the trenches, he came to the conclusion that with the wind as it was when he started he must be well over British territory. The sight of an aerodrome seemed to confirm this view, and he throttled back his engine and slipped down through the obscuring clouds to identify the spot and pick up his position.

Unfortunately, his choice of a spot to

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reconnoitre was a bad one, for no sooner was he well clear of the mist and just beginning to look about him than he was aroused to a sense of danger by the "Rat-tat-tat-tat" of a machine-gun. He opened up his engine and swerved aside just in time to see a Fokker biplane flash past, and as his gaze followed the scout on its downward glide he saw that he was right above a formation of at least thirty machines of the same type. It was too late to think of beating a retreat back to the shelter of the clouds, so he steepened the dive, pressed the triggers of both guns, and rushed right into the centre of the formation.

Taken by surprise at this bold attack of a two-seater bombing machine, the Fokkers scattered. Three bursts of the machine-gun went home, and one Hun fell in flames, whilst two spun rapidly to earth. Then four of the scouts attacked the bomber, each seeking the position under the tail where the pilot knew he would be immune from attack. This gave the observer his chance, and as the scouts manœuvred for their position he steadily concentrated his fire on one machine until the petrol tank was pierced, and the wreckage fell to the ground a roaring mass of flames. Another scout shared the same

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fate, and as the pilot swung round to fight his way through the formation he saw three blazing masses on the ground and two crumpled heaps of wreckage lying near by.

As the bomber charged again the Fokkers did not wait. The man who could attack thirty of their best and fastest scouts on a huge cumbersome bombing machine, and promptly put five of their kind out of action could not be human. The scouts scattered and the bomber flew down a lane of bewildered Germans.

Only when the aeroplane was clear of its enemies did four of the scouts recover from their shock and attempt to attack, but a few bursts from the observer's gun made them decide that the game was not to be attempted, and they sheered off to join their companions in distress.

Though the bomber missed the bomb raid, the observer's report that night showed that much useful work had been accomplished in the course of a few hours, and even if a few hundredweight of explosives remained for use on a future occasion, the destruction of five German machines compensated for this little economy.

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9

BLIMPING

" BLIMPING " is the art of navigating a small non-rigid airship of the coastal patrol type. How the name of " Blimp " originated is wrapped in mystery, but the real " Blimps " were little but a gas bag with an aeroplane fuselage slung from the envelope. The later developments of these rudimentary but distinctly useful craft, carrying a specially built car, are not " Blimps " at all, but the name has stuck. It is these ships which are so well known to every inhabitant of a coastal town, and which are frequently seen flying over London.

The pilot of a " Blimp " is usually a man in the intermediate stage between balloons and ships of the Zeppelin type, which at present represent the highest form of dirigible. Before flying these " S.S." ships, as they are technically called, the pilot passes out on a course of free ballooning and parachute dropping, and is in addition a first-rate engineer, and a competent signaller.

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He has also to acquire a knowledge of gunnery and bomb-dropping.

Submarine hunting is one of the chief uses of these airships, and many U-boats have been accounted for by their instrumentality. From his height above the water the pilot can see the shadow or wake of a submarine long before a surface craft dreams of its approach. He then sends out a wireless message through his signaller, announcing the exact position of the Hun, and proceeds full speed to the spot. If his luck holds he will probably be able to drop a bomb or a depth charge on the target. A spreading patch of oil will announce his success, or possibly the U-boat will come to the surface and the crew escape into the water sooner than drown in their shell. A moment later boats of all sorts will arrive on the scene in consequence of the wireless message sent out, and should the work of the pilot need a finishing touch, they may be depended upon to supply it.

"Blimps" also co-operate with warships in the convoying of merchantmen, and many a British and neutral skipper has had cause to bless the Royal Air Force for providing the eyes which watch on high, and give timely warning of the approach of danger.

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"Blimping" is tiring work, and considerable physical strength is needed to keep one of these vessels under control on a bumpy day. Fourteen hours in the air is not an uncommon experience, and when the pilot eventually returns to his aerodrome, and aided by flares brings his ship back to the hangar, he is generally ready enough to turn in and rest, for he may have to do it again on the morrow.

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10

BEHIND THE TRENCHES

TRANSPORT is one of the essentials of modern warfare. During an attack it is of vital importance that a regular supply of ammunition and necessaries reaches the men in the trenches, and these, together with reserves, are usually brought up as close to the lines as possible by motor transport.

Consequently, during an enemy attack, it is one of the chief duties of the Royal Air Force to locate these streams of transport and either destroy them by means of bombs and machine-gun fire, or signal to our gunners in order that they may concentrate the guns on the correct spot and prevent much-needed supplies reaching the trenches. Columns of troops on the march are also attacked, and many a piece of German line has been lost by the non-arrival of supporting troops, who, in hurrying to the help of their hard-pressed brothers, have been scattered by the work of the R.A.F.

One pilot when patrolling on the other

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side of the trenches noticed that the traffic on one particular road was considerably heavier than elsewhere. He accordingly dropped down a few thousand feet in order to investigate matters, and observed a convoy of lorries and a long column of hurrying troops.

It was the work of a few moments to send out a zone call to the gunners behind our lines, and a minute later shells began to fall amidst the convoy. Through the smoke and dust the pilot could dimly discern a struggling mass, and when the pall cleared, the torn road, littered with shattered lorries and dotted with motionless bodies, showed that his signal to the guns had been effective.

As he gazed upon the scene of his handiwork "Archie" took up the tale, dotting the sky with brown and white puffs of bursting high explosive and shrapnel. Ignoring these demonstrations of anger he commenced to count the damaged lorries, but in the midst of his calculations another convoy hove in sight. Once more he sent out a call to all the batteries within reach, and again the smoke of destruction descended over the country. Before the shell-fire ceased yet a third stream of motor-wagons hove in sight. Fearing that another signal to the

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guns before the second target had been effectively dealt with might cause confusion, he put down the nose of his machine and flew along the line of the latest arrivals, scattering his bombs impartially down the string. His last bomb scored a direct hit, and the resulting explosion seemed to show that at least some of the lorries carried ammunition. A flame leaped high into the air, a deafening roar reached the ear of the pilot, and a spout of tangled iron and woodwork ascended heavenwards. When the cloud cleared he saw that the road was blocked, and that it would be some considerable time before any of the undamaged transport could return.

He then decided to liven matters up a little and wheeling about and dropping to within a couple of hundred feet of the ground turned his machine-gun against the harassed convoy. Time after time he flew the length of the long line of crippled wagons, firing bursts of bullets wherever he saw a group of men, absolutely ignoring the frantic fire from the ground.

It was only the sight of a battalion of infantry which made him give up this work, but, with this still better target in view, he placed a fresh drum of ammunition on his gun and raked the close ranks of the march-

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ing troops until they could stand the fire no longer, broke their formation and scattered in all directions. The pilot then searched out isolated groups, and contemptuous of the rifle fire of the remainder, continued to badger the enemy until his ammunition was all but expended.

Then and not till then did he return to his aerodrome and count the holes in his planes. There were forty in all, but as he had counted forty wrecked lorries he considered the account to be in his favour.

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11

BEGINNER'S LUCK

MIST is responsible for many things in the air. Occasionally it assists the pilot, but more often it is one of his greatest hindrances and the cause of countless accidents.

The pilot, flying low so that he could observe what was happening on the ground, realised what a curse the low-lying vapour could be, but he also realised that it was, to a certain extent, a protection, as he was invisible to all machines flying at a greater height than himself.

He was hunting for information as to the massing of German troops, and so intent was he on his task that he did not pay sufficient heed to his map, with the result that he suddenly awoke to the fact that he was far over the lines, close to the ground, and had not the remotest idea of his position. He glanced at his compass, saw that he was proceeding still farther over German territory, and decided to swing round, gain more height and fly until the lines were crossed, when he

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could land at the first convenient spot and inquire his whereabouts.

With this object in view he pushed up the nose of his machine and commenced to swing round. Unfortunately, he was not a very experienced cloud-pilot, and once he lost sight of the earth became more hopelessly puzzled than before. His compass, instead of helping him, became a hindrance, for when he looked at it to find his bearing, he found that it was swinging round in a most disconcerting manner, and despite his efforts he was utterly unable to steady it. He had heard of compasses behaving in this way before, but this was his first experience of that particular trouble, and he had not the remotest idea of what to do.

While he tried in vain to steady the swinging dial the aeroplane itself was behaving in queer ways. At times the pilot felt himself side-slipping steeply, and pulled out of this danger to find that he had stalled the machine. Next, the singing of the R.A.F. wires warned him that he was diving in a dangerous manner, and a moment later he half thought that he was flying upside down. In sheer fright, for everything he did seemed to be wrong, he took hands and feet off the controls, and let the aeroplane look after

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itself. This was apparently the right thing to do, for he noticed that the machine became steadier, and the compass gradually slowed down until he was able to find that he was flying east, the direction in which the aerodrome lay.

Looking at his watch he concluded that if he had been flying in this direction all the time he should have crossed the trenches long ago, and as he was unable to locate himself on account of the mist, he decided to dive through the clouds, and, if he were then unable to find his position and fly home, land and make inquiries.

Accordingly, he pushed down the nose of the scout until the wind sang in the wires, and at last came again in sight of green fields. There appeared no sign of movement below and the ground had not been cut up by shells. This forced him to the conclusion that he was some way over the lines, and as he was unable to identify the spot on the map he decided to land. A large level meadow offered an excellent spot on which to come to rest, and as he bumped over the surface, he congratulated himself on his luck in finding such an ideal place.

He did not switch off, but throttled the engine right back so that it ticked over

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steadily whilst he looked about him. A peasant was working in the far corner of the field, but as he showed no inclination to come over and proffer help the pilot gently taxied the aeroplane to him and got out. He felt sure that his knowledge of French would be enough to explain what he wanted, and once he knew the whereabouts of his landing, it would be a simple matter to make off and return to the aerodrome.

As he stopped by the now-attentive peasant he saw a troop of cavalry come down the road at a gallop. He smiled to himself as he thought of the promptness with which aid had been sent to him. Doubtless his descent had been noticed by some troops in training, and the cavalry had been sent to his help. Not for a moment did he doubt that they were friendly. The blue-grey of their uniform showed that they were French troopers.

Consequently, he had a rude surprise when he saw the men dismount, half of them rushing towards the aeroplane, and the other half covering him with their rifles. The shout of the peasant thoroughly aroused him to his danger, and galvanised into action he rushed for his machine. A volley of bullets raised splashes of soil all around him, but

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luckily he was untouched. He was closer to the aeroplane than any of the approaching Germans, for he now recognised them as such, and if he could only reach it before them he felt confident of winning through. As he ran shots were fired at him by both parties, but luck favoured him, and he reached the goal unhurt.

Once there it was a matter of seconds for him to jump into the machine, seize his machine-gun, on which a drum of ammunition was ready in place, and fire a burst at the approaching Huns. Both parties quickly dropped to the ground and took such cover as was possible, firing at the pilot as he opened up the engine and steered the aeroplane round so that he could escape into the air.

Pursued by a shower of bullets he taxied rapidly away, then zoomed into the air, and returned to the attack. He felt annoyed at the ending to the episode, and when he recollected that he still had not the remotest idea where he was, he felt that the only thing to do was to wreak his anger on the unfortunate men who had prevented his inquiries.

At the end of a few bursts not a German was to be seen except some motionless

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bodies on the ground. Then once more the pilot swung round and headed east. How far he was from the lines he still did not know, but the mist, which had so befogged him, was clearing, and he hoped to cross the trenches before his petrol gave out.

Unfortunately, the clearing mist proved in some ways a disadvantage, for when he had proceeded but a short way on the journey he sighted a strong formation of German scouts, who promptly gave chase. As his own machine was fast, and he was some distance away from the formation, he might have escaped by flying still further over German territory, but as his petrol supply was getting low and he did not know how far he might have to fly for home, he dared not risk this manœuvre, which would probably result in a forced landing in the enemy's country. The only thing to be done was to go straight forward and try to fight his way through.

So far as he could see there were ten German scouts, each of them a fair match for his own machine. Added to this he was a comparative novice in aerial combat, and though a first-rate pilot had not gained by experience all the tricks of the aerial fighter.

He held to his course and charged at the

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midst of the formation. This bold effort probably puzzled the Huns and enabled him to get in the first burst. He reserved his fire until only about thirty yards from the target, and then pressed the trigger, and held on his course, narrowly missing a collision with his foe. Glancing over his shoulder he saw a mass of yellow flames and smoke falling to earth, and with a thrill realised that he had brought down his first Hun.

But there remained the others to account for. Those he had passed in the first mad rush he did not trouble about. He felt confident that the speed of his own machine would prevent its being overtaken. The remaining four Huns meanwhile awaited him.

Not daring to repeat his tactics, he swerved aside, then zoomed round and rushed at the nearest of his foes. As he banked he saw the yellow flash of his opponent's gun, and felt a stinging pain in his leg. No real damage was done—only the skin was cut. But it served to madden him. Careless of what might happen, thoughtless of the bullets which were sprayed about him from the other machines, he stuck to the man who had wounded him, harrying him from place to place, until at last he secured a good

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position, and fired from both guns until the ammunition gave out. As he stooped to place a fresh drum in position he noticed his foe waver, then abruptly the planes collapsed, and the broken remains hurtled to earth.

Before he had time to feel triumph at this second victory, two of the scouts were upon him, his machine was caught in a converging fire and riddled with bullets. Luckily no vital spot was touched, and he himself escaped damage, but it would probably have been a matter of minutes only before the end came had not his foes suddenly banked over, and vanished in his wake.

Looking about him for the cause of this hasty departure, the pilot saw an approaching British formation, and realised that his salvation was secured just in time.

A few minutes later he saw the trenches ahead, and when at last he knew that he could easily glide into safety his engine spluttered and finally the propeller ceased to revolve.

He landed about a mile behind the lines, without straining a wire. His luck, which had stood him in good stead all day, lasted until the end.

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12

FIRE !

DEATH is encountered twenty times daily, cheerfully, as part of the day's work, but fire is never regarded as one of the legitimate risks of an airman's life.

Whilst the two-seater fighter was on escort duty, she encountered a large patrol of enemy scouts. Without hesitation the pilot charged down upon the Huns, and he and his observer started to liven things up. A burst from the pilot's gun caught a scout fairly in the centre section. Smoke emerged from the fuselage, and a moment later the red flames burst out, and the machine plunged to earth. Meanwhile the observer had been busy with another Boche, and the pilot paused from his shooting just in time to see the planes collapse from a second machine, and the remains whirl to the ground.

A pause ensued whilst the Huns regained their formation, which had been spoiled by the first rush of the British

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fighter. Then a cloud of scouts attacked again. The pilot swung round the 'plane to give his observer a chance, but even as his foot pressed home on the rudder-bar a stinging blow paralysed the limb, the machine fell out of the turn, side-slipped a few hundred feet, and then dropped into its normal position just as the pilot realised that he was wounded. As he flattened out the two-seater the Huns charged down again and once more a burst went home, this time in the petrol tank. For a moment nothing happened, but pilot and observer stared each other in the face waiting for what might occur. Then it happened. First a jet of black smoke appeared, next fire blazed along the fuselage.

The observer jumped to his feet and seized the Pyrene fire-extinguisher. Before the flames spread he directed a spray on to the burning part, and kept the fire under. The pilot pushed down the nose of the machine and headed for home. Behind flew the German scouts, pouring out streams of bullets in an endeavour to finish off the machine. Alternately firing a burst from the gun and plying his fire-extinguisher, the observer hoped for the best. The wounded pilot gritted his teeth and despite the pain

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in his leg held the machine on a straight course, diving steeply for home. Little by little the fire spread, eating its way along the longerons of the fuselage. The wind fanned the flames, and as the observer turned to his gun the fire rose fiercely, only to fall as the spray of the Pyrene fell upon it.

Closer and closer came the ground, and more and more determined grew the attacks of the Huns. They did not mean to let the half-destroyed prey slip through their fingers, and fired vainly in their efforts to finish off the two-seater. The pilot grew faint with pain, but summoned up his strength and held on. And all the while the observer fought both flames and Huns.

They landed just on our side of the lines. As they touched earth the longerons snapped and, as the observer dragged the wounded pilot clear of the wreckage, the flames shot up and completed their work.

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13

IN THE MOONLIGHT

INDIVIDUALITY counts for more in the Royal Air Force than in any other of the three Services. When an officer is told to go up at night and carry out an offensive patrol, he is quite aware that definite orders cannot be given him, and he must depend on his own initiative to obtain good results from his patrol.

This particular pilot was told to proceed at night and carry out a patrol over one of the German aerodromes. Thinking he might be able to " have a good time " he took a full load of bombs, and as much ammunition as he could carry in his machine. Thus equipped he set out to annoy the Boche.

Just to liven things up and advise the foe of his presence, he dropped a couple of bombs on the hangars. Both were good shots, and the resulting flames assured him that he had not wasted his time. As the machine-guns on the ground commenced to spit out bullets, he drew off a little to await

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the arrival of some of the machines which he had good reason to believe were absent from the aerodrome on a bombing expedition over the British lines.

He did not wait long before the moon rose, and in the pale light he was able to make out the form of a large two-seater rapidly approaching. He waited until the German pilot throttled down his engine to land, then dived out of the sky and trained his gun on to his victim. In the darkness he could plainly watch the course of his incendiary bullets, and saw them strike about the engine and nacelle of the landing aeroplane. Apparently his shots were not fatal, for the machine landed in safety. Again he drew off to await events.

In a few minutes lights began to appear about the newly-landed two-seater, and the pilot was able to see, aided by the beams of the moon, that his shots had taken effect, for the pilot of the German machine limped away, supported by his fellows, whilst the observer was carried away on a stretcher. Thinking that he might as well make a complete job of his work the pilot dropped a few hundred feet and fired steadily at the two-seater until at last the shots took effect, the petrol tank was pierced by a burning

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bullet, and the whole machine became a mass of flames.

Whilst thus occupied, he noticed the arrival of another of the raiders. As he was not in time to use his machine-gun before the enemy landed, he sailed low over the aerodrome and dropped a bomb right in the path of the taxying Hun. Though he missed the actual aeroplane, the high explosive tore a huge hole in the ground only a few yards in front of it, and before the pilot could change his direction he had run into the edge of the crater, crashing the aeroplane to pieces.

By this time the Huns thought the intruder should be dealt with. Suddenly searchlights shone out from three points, their beams converging on the British machine. Simultaneously heavy fire opened from the ground and things became hot for the pilot, who was forced to twist and dodge in the moonlight to shake off the steady fire which played around his aeroplane. At last, finding the German fire was becoming a real nuisance and interfering with his work, he dived at the nearest searchlight and dimmed its light with a well-aimed burst of bullets. The second he dealt with in like manner, and the third wisely shut off its

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beams before he attacked. Then the machine-gun fire ceased, and he had peace.

A few minutes later he saw the approach of another Hun, and at once attacked in mid-air. Taken by surprise, the Boche tried to run for home, but in his haste he misjudged his height and flew straight into the aerodrome. The pilot heard a sickening crash as the two-seater crumpled up into matchwood, and a thought of pity for the crew passed through his mind.

He was, however, allowed little time for reflection, for a fourth machine appeared out of the night. This time it was no heavy two-seater returning from a raid, but one of the latest type of enemy scouts. Then began a single combat in the moonlight. The pilots and machines were very evenly matched; each had a full bag of tricks learned by long experience of fighting in the air. Once the Hun got on the tail of the British scout and fired a burst which narrowly missed putting an end to the pilot's career, but no material damage was done and the pilot side-slipped away into safety. Then he zoomed into the face of the moon, followed by his opponent, looped suddenly, and came out sitting on the tail of his foe. A long burst from the machine-

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gun and the German scout staggered. A second burst and it fell into a spin. Halfway to earth the planes collapsed, and the remains crashed on the aerodrome near the wreckage of the three other machines.

By this time the east was growing grey with the approach of dawn, and the pilot thought he had done enough for one night's work, so he disposed of his two remaining bombs by dropping them on the hangars, and then turned his face towards the British lines.

And the moon looked down on the work, and the "old man" smiled as he saw the havoc which had been wrought by one man on one tiny machine.

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14

DUTY FIRST

PHOTOGRAPHY is generally thought to be a fairly safe and harmless hobby, but photography in the air can sometimes be full enough of excitement to satisfy even the most hot-blooded of pilots.

The pilot of the two-seater, armed with camera and plates, crossed the lines at an immense altitude, and prepared for work. His targets were several batteries which needed photographing, and he cruised over the ground looking for the slightest sign which might lead him to the enemy's gun positions. Instead of gun positions he found trouble, for before he was aware of their approach two triplanes and four biplanes like himself were manœuvring into the best positions to destroy him.

Like a flash he left his camera work, turned to his guns, and rushed at the nearest of the Huns. Before his charge a two-seater flinched and gave ground. Ere the pilot could regret this error a burst of bullets

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caught the petrol tank, and in a mass of smoke and flames the machine rushed downwards.

The next minute the British machine nearly shared a like fate. A bullet caught the tank and a red flame gushed out towards him. Thinking that all was finished so far as fighting was concerned, the pilot pushed down the nose of the two-seater diving steeply, trying to reach earth before the flames devoured him.

The steepness of his dive saved him, for the tremendous rush of the wind stifled the flames, and the fire went out. Luckily this was only the emergency tank, and the main petrol supply was still undamaged, so the pilot rose again to the attack.

Unfortunately for themselves the Huns had made too sure of their victim, and were not prepared for his recovery. Consequently, when the pilot regained control of his machine and rushed at his opponents he gained another victory before the attack was realised. Then the remaining Huns closed around him, and from safe positions poured in a fourfold fire. Bullet after bullet struck the machine as the pilot turned on first one and then another of his enemies. Holes appeared in the planes, splinters flew

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from the damaged spars and struts, his wind-screen was pierced. So far the pilot himself remained unhurt.

Not being a fighting machine, the two-seater did not carry an over-large supply of ammunition, and realising that this was running short, the pilot turned for home. He hated leaving the show, but four to one, and the one without ammunition, did not appeal to him. As he turned, a well-aimed burst shot through both the centre section struts, and with torn planes and splintered ribs he flew towards the lines. All around him were his foes, like jackals yelping round a wounded lion, yet fearing to come to close quarters. Then suddenly out of the sky help appeared in the shape of a strong formation of British scouts. The Huns hastily fled for their aerodrome.

For a moment the pilot carried on towards home and safety. He glanced at the torn planes, the damaged struts. Then his camera caught his eye, and the thought came into his head that he had not taken the required photos. Without further delay he swung round the machine and when the formation of scouts swept by he was flying over the old spot, anxiously peering at the earth for the betraying gun-flashes.

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15

BURNING THEM OUT

BOMBING forms one of the most important of the duties of the Royal Air Force, and this particular work becomes of paramount importance during a big advance of the armies on the ground. Then the bombing squadrons go out by night and by day and worry the Hun in every manner possible. His retreating columns of troops are scattered by bombs dropped in the midst of men, convoys bringing up supplies of all kinds are attacked from the air, the drivers of the lorries are killed, the wagons overturned, the ammunition exploded. Bridges which must be crossed during the retreat are cut, railway stations are blown up, trains are derailed. And above all his aerodromes are ceaselessly bombed, in order that German machines may not ascend and fly over the lines to discover the movements of the attacking troops of the Allies.

It was to carry out work of this nature that a formation of bombers left the aero-

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drome in the very early hours of the morning, crossed the trenches, which could be dimly seen through a film of mist, and carried on many miles into German territory. "Archie" put up a feeble barrage, but in the uncertain light his shooting was bad, and the searchlights were useless to help his gunners in finding the raiders. When the aerodrome was reached, the leader signalled to his formation, and planed down to get a clearer view of matters. Meanwhile the accompanying escort of fighting scouts kept a vigilant look-out for the possible approach of any Huns who resented this intrusion into their territory.

Below could be seen the aerodrome, and flanking it, rows of hangars, workshops, and billets. On the grass, outside the camouflaged hangars, were two big fighters. Otherwise the place seemed deserted. Not a gun fired at them, not a machine-gun stuttered out its bullets into the dawn. The formation leader metaphorically rubbed his hands and prepared to attack. The formation dropped out of the sky, and, with engines throttled back, not to disturb the quiet camp, planed down to within a thousand feet of the ground. Then the fun started.

One after another, hangars, workshops

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and buildings received attention. The first bombs fell fairly upon a row of hangars, painted in smudged yellows, browns and greens, to deceive the invaders. Flames of fire shot up from the roofs of the sheds, and a few minutes later black clouds of smoke issued from the wrecked buildings, and spread like a pall over the scene. Through the smoke could be seen flashes of fire as the flames licked round the inflammable machines sheltering inside, and faint, dull explosions proclaimed the bursting of the petrol tanks. Long before the raid was finished the whole equipment of the squadron was burnt out, and the unit put out of action for many days.

At the sound of the first bombs the aerodrome sprang into life. Figures hurried out of the huts close to the hangars, covers were thrown off machine-guns, and the air was filled with whistling bullets. In their excitement the German gunners fired wildly, and no damage was done, but they brought their doom upon themselves, for the scouts dived out of the skies to within a few feet of the ground, and at almost point blank range fired burst after burst at the guns until all were silent, their crews dead, or wounded. The mass of men who rushed

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from the huts also got a share of the fire from above, and before they could take shelter many motionless bodies lay upon the ground.

Two pilots, either braver men than their fellows or more foolhardy, rushed to the machines which stood waiting on the grass. Mechanics followed to start up their engines. As they clambered into their seats, hoping to rise and attack the raiders, one of the bombers dropped a load of explosive. It fell fairly on one of the machines, and when the smoke cleared no sign of aeroplane or pilot was to be seen, only a smoking hole in the earth. The other machine was already moving across the grass when a bomb fell on the spot it had just left. Beyond tearing another hole in the ground it did no damage, and the aeroplane rose into the air. Before the pilot could even fire a shot at the raiders two scouts came at him. Their accurate converging fire caught the German fighter fairly in its most vital parts. The pilot fell forward in his seat, flames sprang from the petrol tank, and the machine crashed downwards. No other aeroplanes attempted to put off. Probably they were all destroyed in the burning hangars.

Whilst this short combat was going on,

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the bombers had been dealing with the other buildings. Workshops and men's huts were destroyed; the officers' mess was completely blown up by three direct hits. Everywhere were scenes of destruction and death. Their work completed, the British airmen prepared to leave.

Rising steadily, keeping their formation, the machines departed towards the lines. Behind them lay the still burning ruins of the wrecked aerodrome. A column of smoke rose many thousands of feet into the air, showing as a sign of damage done for several miles around. It was probably this pillar of smoke that gave the warning to the other aerodromes, for the formation had not proceeded far on its journey before three swarms of Huns approached from different points of the compass. Each patrol consisted of at least twenty machines. All were fast fighters, well armed and determined to avenge their brethren. As they approached within range of the bombers the escort split up to take on any odds, confident in their power to hold their own against the biggest swarm the Germans could produce.

Straight to the attack came the Huns. The British scouts were at the disadvantage of five to one, but the bombers could be

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relied upon to look after themselves against any but the most tremendous of odds, though their duty was not to fight whilst escape lay within their power. They had done their work in destroying the home of the Huns. It was now the turn of the scouts. For a while the air seemed full of a mass of machines gone mad. Whirling propellers, banking 'planes, firing guns—all added to the seeming confusion. It was marvellous that collisions did not take place. Then the British scouts drew first blood, and a Hun spun down hopelessly out of control, his wires shot through, his elevator gone, and crashed helplessly to the earth beneath. A moment later a second aeroplane burst into flames, and fell slowly in a wide circle to the ground, where it lay blazing, a sign to encourage the British pilots, and an ill omen for their foes.

Madly the pilots fought to prevent the Huns from breaking away to attack their charges. As Boche after Boche tried to escape from the hard-hitting little scouts, and attack the slower bombers, the fighters dashed after them and turned them from their prey. Time after time the Huns were herded in like sheep before a dog, and all the while guns spat forth streams of bullets,

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seeking the vital parts of whirling machines. One British scout was badly hit and fell out of the fight, closely followed by a Hun. Before the Boche could finish his deadly work another scout fell out of the sky, the Hun's planes collapsed, and the remains whirled earthwards past the stricken British 'plane. The latter landed safely some minutes after.

Despite all the efforts of the scouts, three Huns passed their defence and rapidly overhauled the bombers, which were now drawing well away from the conflict. None of the three returned. As they approached, confident in their ability to do as they pleased with the slower machines, the observer of the rearmost bomber fired a long burst from his Lewis gun, catching the first Hun and sending him down in flames. The two others were more careful, and approached cautiously. Time after time they made short rushes into the formation, but each time were beaten off by the gunnery of pilots and observers. No others joined them, and the formation with the two attacking scouts drew nearer and nearer to the lines. The fight of the Britons and Huns gradually fell farther and farther into the rear. Then another Boche received his death-wound, and spun rapidly to earth.

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The third and last turned to flee, but was too late in his determination. Shots from three machines caught the scout simultaneously, the planes dropped off in mid-air, and the helpless pilot and fuselage plunged to their doom.

Meanwhile the escort had been holding their own. Almost every machine showed signs of damage, but no serious harm was done. Five Huns had been shot down, and only one British machine had been forced to land. The patrol leader glanced around, and seeing that the bombers were nearly out of sight commenced to withdraw his flock towards the lines. Ammunition was getting low, and it would be fatal to remain helpless in the vicinity. Apparently the Huns were of the same mind, and seeing that their expected prey, the formation, was out of reach, had no stomach to continue the combat with people so well able to look after themselves. They, therefore, broke off the fight, leaving the British machines victorious in the sky.

When the patrol reached home all the bombers had landed in safety. Their casualties were nil. One scout had been lost. On the face of it, it seemed that the bomb raid had been a complete success.

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16

OUT OF THE DOG-FIGHT

DASH is the prime requisite of the successful scout pilot. He may be as brave as a lion, as clever as an owl, but unless he possesses the tricks and impudence of a monkey he had better stick to heavier machines than take over a tiny fighting scout.

When the patrol leader caught sight of the large body of German machines he swung round his formation of scouts and dashed into the fray. Taken by surprise by the sudden onslaught the Huns scattered and the air seemed full of whirling propellers and machines flying hither and thither with no apparent purpose, spitting fire and lead as they manœuvred to avoid collisions with each other. Technically, such a mix-up is called a dog-fight.

After some minutes of this seeming confusion, when pilots hardly knew which was friend and which was enemy, the two formations settled down to a number of individual combats, for they were of approximately

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equal strength. True, if a scout in swerving from its immediate opponent got a chance to pump lead into another machine, the pilot promptly took the chance before returning to his own affair. This combat continued for some time and seemed likely to last indefinitely with little harm to either side, when a further large formation of Fokker biplanes arrived and put a different complexion on things. The odds were now at least three to one, and it behoved the patrol leader to bring his flock safely out of danger before they were wiped out. But he hated to leave without doing some damage to the Boche.

With this thought in his mind he singled out the leader of the Huns and strove to get under his tail where he could deal with him at his leisure. Unfortunately for the success of his plan the Hun, too, was an old airman, and was quite aware of the desire of the British leader. Little by little these two machines drew apart from the whirling mass of the others. Twice out of the corner of his eye the patrol leader saw machines go down in flames and knew them for Huns. He smiled, thinking this a good omen. Then he got his chance. The Boche had dived at him, hoping to pierce the petrol tank, but

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before the shots took effect the pilot pulled over his machine in a quick loop, came out as the Hun swept by, swerved after him, and as the German came up to the attack fell nicely into position under his tail. Turn and twist as he might the Hun was unable to free himself from his foe. Burst after burst was fired, and at last a stream of bullets went fairly home, catching the main spars where they joined the fuselage, and the planes collapsed, leaving the remains to fall helpless to earth.

The Germans had witnessed the fall of their leader, and three of them detached themselves to attack the victor. The first to arrive met with an untimely fate. He was caught fairly by a storm of bullets, and pouring out flames and smoke his machine fell to join that of his dead comrade. The fight continued.

At last the end came. Luck could last no longer, and a bullet pierced the petrol tank of the British machine. A stream of liquid gushed over the face of the pilot, and, blinded and groping, he pushed down the nose of his machine, trying to spin out of danger. When he had dropped a few thousand feet he dashed the petrol from his eyes and righted the scout, but no sooner had he

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glanced about him than a machine-gun opened fire in his rear, and he looked round to find two Fokkers bearing down upon him. He swerved sharply, but even as he turned his engine cut out and a sheet of flame rushed along the fuselage. Once more he pushed down the nose of his machine.

The trenches were not far distant, and he was still some two thousand feet from the ground, but as he dodged and twisted, gliding for home, the two Fokkers flew along behind him, doing their utmost to finish off the affair. Utterly unable to use his gun, the pilot looked about him for help. None was in sight, for all his formation were busily engaged with the enemy. Then, suddenly the Huns wheeled. Apparently they had already had enough fighting for one day, and left for their aerodrome, closely followed by the British machines. The two Fokkers saw the departure of their companions, and realised their danger should the British machines return. Then they also turned and fled.

Closer and closer crept the trenches, but the pilot had little worry now as to his ultimate safety. Bullets from the ground played around him, but he concentrated all his energies on reaching earth before the

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flames played out their part. Below he saw a comparatively level patch, the trenches flashed by, and, as the flames ate through the framework of the planes, the wheels of the machine touched earth, and the pilot stepped clear just as the petrol tank exploded.

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17

VALOUR

GERMANY has many things to learn, but one would hardly expect her to take an example of chivalry from Great Britain.

During the recent fighting in France a pilot of the Royal Air Force had the misfortune to be shot down behind the German lines. He, himself, was unhurt, but the engine was put out of action and he landed safely near a large rest camp of the enemy. On reaching earth he was promptly captured and marched off under escort to be examined by the German commander.

Though closely questioned, the pilot refused to give any information that might be of value to the Huns, merely stating his name and regiment, which every captive should do in order to secure the treatment of a prisoner of war. The most blustering manner was tried upon him; kindness was offered; even release was promised if only he would tell certain things about the latest types of machines, and the positions of certain

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units. The officer refused to answer, merely stating that he was not able to do as they wished.

Then the last card was played. He was informed that if he would not tell all he knew, and betray his country, he would be taken away and shot. Still the pilot remained silent, preferring to die rather than betray his trust. His arms were bandaged and he was led away with an escort of armed men.

It so happened that the German charged with his examination had not been entirely ruined by association with the Prussians, and was still capable of feeling admiration for a courageous man. His better feelings were evoked by this display of constancy, and he countermanded his orders. The pilot was not shot; instead the German commander paraded his men, told them how this British officer had behaved under the circumstances, and exhorted them to imitate that example if captured.

Deeds like this are of every day occurrence behind the lines, but seldom come to light. Men who brave the Hun to do his worst, even when confronted with murder in cold blood, and knowing that the Hun has so often kept his promise of "frightfulness,"

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deserve more than nine out of ten men who gain recognition and reward for meritorious service performed during the heat of battle.

Why is this recognition so often withheld ?

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18

'TWIXT SUN AND MOON

CLOUDS and mist are a great hindrance sometimes in the air. Every now and again the pilot obtained a glimpse of his enemy as he appeared out of a bank of fog, and once he was able to fire a short burst into the side of the scout, but he could not be sure that he did any damage, for the Hun immediately dived again into the vapour, from which he did not reappear.

Thinking it useless to potter about at that altitude, for he was over 15,000 feet in the air, the pilot pushed down the nose of his machine, hoping to dive to clearer air below the clouds. In this, however, he was mistaken, for in a minute he became enveloped in the thickest of black clouds that he had ever experienced. The dark curling vapour closed all around him, obscuring everything, so that he could not even read his instruments. Either the damp mist or some other cause had affected his lights, and he was unable to switch on the

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smallest current in order that he might glance at his compass and find the direction.

At last he caught a sign of a lighter patch in the darkness, and flew joyfully towards it. Now that, as he thought, he had seen the sun he felt sure he was flying in the right direction and a few minutes should take him over the line. Once clear of the trenches he could land in the first open space, inquire his whereabouts and await better weather. He descended to within 300 feet of the ground and carried on, flying towards the light patch amidst the murk and pouring rain.

He carefully judged his time, and when he had allowed ample space in which to clear the trenches, he throttled down, and seeing a fairly open space landed.

No sooner did his wheels touch the ground than an inferno of fire burst out. Every machine-gun and rifle in existence seemed turned against him. Holes appeared in his planes, bullets whistled about his head and body. By some miracle he was not hit and rose again in safety before he could catch a glimpse of his enemies.

Then the fog suddenly lifted for a moment, and warm on his neck he felt the rays of the sun. Turning his head he verified the fact. He had actually been

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flying from the sun, proceeding in exactly the wrong direction, flying in the face of the moon.

This time he made no mistake about it. He flew low, just clearing the trees until he dimly discerned the trenches beneath him. Then he waited until a smooth piece of grass offered a place on which to land, and slowly drifted down into safety.

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19

SHIPS OF THE AIR

"THE convoy leaves to-morrow at two o'clock. You and Smith will go out with them, escort them until dark, and then return. Keep us well informed as to the news by your wireless."

So spoke the squadron commander of one of the units of the Royal Air Force which is on active service at home, for airships are playing a most important part in the work of supplying the country with food—a part which is fully recognised by their old comrades, the ships of the Navy.

At one o'clock the "Blimp" was brought from her shed, ballasted up, and rose slowly in the air, her four-bladed propeller revolving in the sunlight. Once she had ascended a couple of hundred feet the pilot levelled her up, slightly opened the throttle, and she moved seawards.

The twisting arms of the estuary lay immediately below, but the pilot steered straight across country until he came to the

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spot where the open sea was reached, and where, well protected by booms and mines, lay the waiting convoy. Sixteen ships of all sizes and nationalities, from the five thousand ton cargo boat from the U.S.A. to the tramp of barely a thousand tons hailing from a distant South American port. Flags of Scandinavia and of South American Republics, of allies and neutrals flew from the mastheads. Representatives of all nationalities lay in safety behind the defences of British waters, their striped and weirdly camouflaged sides making them look like antediluvian monsters newly come to life again.

The pilot rapidly picked out the senior ship of the escort which lay near by, and passed a message to his signaller to send down. When the flags had ceased to flutter, he opened out his engine and headed out to sea.

Already the mine-sweepers and patrol boats were out searching the vicinity for any enemy who might be lying in wait for a chance to damage the convoy, but the pilot in the airship could see both farther and deeper than those who abode on the surface of the waters, and rapidly drove out to sea. Once he stopped to speak a brine-covered

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trawler which had been out for nearly three weeks, asking for news of a submarine which had been reported in the vicinity and sending the latest war news in exchange for the information. Then he swept backwards and forwards over the water, scanning the depths for stray mines or the trace of a submarine, whilst the sweepers crept slowly along the surface.

Presently the convoy left harbour, steaming in two long lines abreast whilst swarms of P-boats and drifters zigzagged rapidly about their charges. Round came the "Blimp" to take up her position with the boats, finally hovering like a guarding angel on the outskirts of the mass of ships, watching over protected and protectors alike, scanning the waters for any sign of a hostile periscope.

Mile by mile the convoy crept forward, the escort ships constantly moving round, covering thrice the miles of the slow merchantmen. Far away, on the other flank of the convoy, the pilot could see his companion airship, employed like himself, in watching the waters. Then suddenly his eye was arrested by a suspicious shadow in the water. Round swung the "Blimp," nose down, engine opened out, as she dashed for the spot. The signaller eagerly called up

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the nearest boats, sending them the news of an enemy, while the pilot quickly adjusted his bomb sights, moved over the fusing lever, and seized the release. For one moment the periscope showed in a foam of water. Next minute a hundred pound bomb burst a yard from the spot, the periscope vanished, and when the turmoil of waters had quietened no sign of the enemy was to be seen. A P-boat dropped a couple of depth charges to make certain of things, and then slowly a stain spread over the waters, the iridescent sheen of oil, the patch growing larger and larger as more and more bubbles rose to the surface. The P-boat rejoined the convoy, and the "Blimp" after a last look round returned to her station.

Meanwhile the merchantmen had carried on undisturbed, secure in the knowledge that they were safe, watched by the eyes from above.

Darkness drew on as the sun sank below the horizon, and a light blinked from the other airship. The signaller answered it and passed the message back to the pilot. A minute later another message came through on the wireless, and was duly written down and handed back. The pilot smiled. It was the signal to return home.

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The convoy had passed the danger zone, the seaships were now sufficient protection. A light flashed from the airship to the convoy. "Good night, Good luck," read the message. Then the "Blimp" swung round in a steady circle, the roar of the engine increased, and she set her course beneath the stars for home. It was 1 a.m. when they landed; the flight had lasted just over twelve hours, but it was quite an ordinary day's work.

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20

THE END OF A BOCHE

FIGHTING in the air by day has its excitements, but a combat by night is still more adventurous.

Whilst on night patrol the pilot sighted a big twin-engined German machine, which was heading in the direction of the British lines, loaded with bombs, on business intent. Without hesitation he flew at it, and in the darkness fired a burst of bullets from a range of about fifty yards. He could see the lines of the flaming bullets as they struck the machine, and as it flashed by into the night he thought he saw the observer fall forward in his seat. He swung round after his foe, and diving again, fired another burst at close range. This time he was sure of his success for one propeller slowly ceased to revolve owing to the damage he had caused the engine.

When he fired the second burst he was right over the tail of the Hun. The Boche pilot, knowing himself damaged, dived, try-

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ing to throw off his opponent. For a moment the British machine was caught in the backwash of the big bomber's propeller, and at once got out of control. Down slipped the scout into the night, and when the pilot again regained command his foe had vanished in the darkness.

Backwards and forwards he flew, searching the sky for a trace of the Hun. It was bad luck to come within an ace of success, and then to be deprived of his victim. Once he thought he saw a darker patch against the sky and raced hurriedly towards it, only to find that he had been led out of his path by his imagination, and that nothing awaited him.

At last, despairing of finding the Boche, he turned his nose homewards and flew for the lines. Then, just as he glimpsed the gashes in the earth ahead of him, he again saw below him the form of a vast bomber. It was the same machine, for a moment later he was able to perceive that only one engine was working. He smiled with glee. The Boche had tried to elude him and had failed. Now the end would surely come.

Out of the night he dropped, pouring forth a tornado of lead. The Hun saw his doom approach, but was unable to flee.

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A storm of bullets put the other engine out of action, and the bomber crashed between the lines. As she hit earth a terrific roar shook the night, and the flames of the explosion lit up the ground for yards around as the bombs meant for the destruction of hospitals and defenceless homes scattered the remains of the machine to the four winds.

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21

THE STRAFERS

A TALE OF THE OFFENSIVE PATROL

OFFENSIVE patrols set out with the sole object of destroying Huns and Hun planes. Their object is to prevent the Boche from being in the air at all, so that there is no possibility of his machines obtaining information likely to be of use to the German staff. The Hun also sends out these patrols for a similar purpose. When two opposing patrols meet there is every likelihood of the most exciting fight desired by any pilot, however full of dash and pluck.

The large offensive patrol which flew over the lines one morning in late August, led by an experienced pilot, flying in perfect formation, composed of about a dozen of our latest and best fighting scouts, was the last thing the average Hun would go out of his way to meet. Consequently it devolved on the leader to seek out the enemy at his work—reconnaissance, artillery spotting, bombing or offensive patrol.

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Some two miles the other side of the lines the first victim was sighted, a solitary two-seater, hard at work ranging the German guns. No scout escort was in sight, though the leader thought it probable that one lurked in the neighbourhood. It was rather like baby-killing. One fat old German two-seater against twelve handy little British scouts. For a moment the leader was tempted to go by and seek a foe more worthy of his steel.

Then he thought of the men in the trenches being pounded to bits by the fire of the German guns directed by the pilot of this machine, and his compunction vanished. He dipped the nose of his aeroplane and fell through space. Glancing over his shoulder he saw his formation following down, keeping their appointed places as though connected by an invisible wire. The Hun turned to bolt for home. His decision was taken too late. The formation overhauled him, and almost simultaneously the guns of the three leading machines spoke. Slowly, almost carefully, the wings of the stricken machine folded up, fire burst from the wreckage, and the remains vanished, whirling through the clouds.

Up into the air again sped the formation.

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They had dropped a couple of thousand feet to bag their victim, and it behoved them to regain their point of vantage. This done they cruised on over the lines looking for victims. A solitary scout was sighted, but it fled for safety long before the formation was within range. On the ground were bodies of troops, but little good could be done then by diving and slaying a few hundreds of them. A string of "sausages" bobbed along the horizon; these could wait. Aeroplanes only were worth attacking at present.

Presently the leader sighted a number of dots some distance away. He wheeled his flock, and they sped forward to investigate matters. The dots proved to be a formation of bombers setting out to raid a point in the British lines. At the approach of the scouts they turned again for home. A number of fighters detached themselves from the fleeing bombers, and awaited the approach of the scouts. There was something nervous in their waiting. No anxiety to rush into the fight was apparent. Clearly they were fighting only from a sense of duty to protect their slower brethren who were not so well able to look after themselves. Then the scouts arrived, and closed with

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their enemies. The bombers retreated in the distance.

Retaining their positions, the scouts concentrated their fire on the German leader. If he could be disposed of early in the combat it would greatly help matters. He apparently divined their object, and dived his machine, spinning into safety. The formation did not follow him down, but commenced to deal methodically with the others. Groups of British machines concentrated their fire on single Hun fighters, driving them one by one from the combat until only a few were left undamaged, the surrounding sky being dotted with more or less damaged machines. The German leader lay a few thousand feet below the others, obviously waiting for a British scout to drop out so that he might attack and finish him off. His attitude caught the eye of the formation leader, who signalled to his deputy to carry on, pushed down the nose of his machine, and went to meet the Hun. The Hun was a brave man, and willing to indulge in single combat with an equal though he did not relish the concentrated fire of several guns.

For a while the two scouts circled round each other, like boxers looking for an open-

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ing. First one essayed to dash to a favourable spot only to be countered by his opponent. Then the other would zoom in the hope of outflanking his foe, but when he swung round he would find the other waiting for him. In and out among the clouds they dashed, now dropping a few hundred feet, then ascending a little. Every moment was full of anxiety and eagerness to get in a burst. And the whole manœuvres were carried out in machines flying at about a hundred and twenty miles an hour.

The British pilot drew first blood. He attempted to zoom, and then, deceiving his opponent, he throttled back the engine and stalled. Like a flash he whipped round, getting a momentary glimpse of his enemy above and in front of him. Rapidly he looked through the sights and pressed the triggers of his three guns. A mighty storm of lead flew through the air, tearing a great hole in his foe's fuselage, just missing the pilot himself, but ripping open the fabric, and probably damaging the longerons beneath. Down went the nose of the Hun as he dived away. At the bottom of his dive he pulled back the control lever to loop away from his following enemy. Up swept the machine to the top of the loop—

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and there it collapsed. The bullets had almost broken its back, and the extra strain of the loop had completed the work. Almost in two pieces the stricken fighter fell to earth.

By this time the rest of the formation were in the distance, and the leader put up the nose of his machine and opened his throttle to come up with them. As he approached the patrol swung round to meet him. The deputy-leader had seen his return, and as the Boche formation had scattered with the loss of several machines, he gave up the leadership of the flock to his C.O.

For a while the scouts cruised about in the vicinity, seeking for any machines they might have overlooked. As nothing more was seen the patrol left that part of the line and swept south. They were just in time to fall in with a strong formation of the fastest Hun scouts and, as they were outnumbered by more than two to one, for a moment things looked ill for the British pilots. Then the leader asserted himself. Gathering up his followers he swept into the midst of the Huns. Completely surprised by this bold attack by a numerically inferior force, the Boche pilots gave way before the rush. That break was their

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undoing. As he swept through the British leader fired a long burst into a gaudily painted Fokker. A moment later crimson was added to the blue and yellow as the Boche fell, flaming, through the sky. Again the formation wheeled and charged their foes. This time they were greeted by a storm of bullets which tore through the planes of the leader's machine, narrowly missing both himself and the petrol tank. Out of the corner of his eye he saw two Hun fighters collapse, one with its planes shot away, the second in flames, and knew that the work of his flock was good. After that the patrol ceased to be a formation. Fighting developed into individual combats. Here a British machine fought a German scout in a single duel. There three Huns fired from all quarters at a solitary British scout. The leader was engaged with four of the enemy, and knew that his formation was broken. The air was full of machines, whirling hither and thither at a rate of over a hundred miles an hour, firing indiscriminately at every foe which got in the way. There was little manœuvring for position. The conditions of a " dog-fight " ruled.

The leader's hands were full with his four opponents. No sooner did he cause

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one to retire for a moment than another presented itself. Shots rained through his planes. The fabric was cut into strips, splinters flew from the struts. Then his chance came and one of the four left the fight badly wounded. Three bullets had struck him and he was glad to leave the affair to the others. A bullet grazed the British pilot's cheek, drawing a stream of blood. This maddened him and he rushed about recklessly, firing almost blindly into the air; everything seemed a Hun. Then he cooled down and saw that only two of his opponents were left. What had happened to the other he did not know.

Across his sight fell a British machine, obviously nearly out of control. Two Huns sailed out of the sky to finish off the affair. The leader dashed to his companion's rescue. At the first burst one of the Boche machines trembled in the air. Then it fell into a slow spin and left the sky. The other fled before the mad rush of the British pilot.

Above him his companions were holding their own. Each side had lost several machines when the leader returned to his flock. Two Huns fell, flaming, as he approached. Again he went mad; he saw red. When he recovered himself a little he noticed

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that the air was becoming clearer of machines. The Huns had received enough, and were retiring before they sustained more losses. At first the leader was tempted to follow, but decided on the wiser course, and mustering his flock, now sadly shot about and three fewer than when the patrol started, swung round for home.

The trenches were some miles away, and a few rounds were left to most of the scouts. A "sausage" bobbing fatly in the sun attracted the leader's attention, and he again left the flock to his deputy, and dived almost vertically through the air. A terrific storm of "Archie" greeted his arrival. The mechanics below rapidly hauled on the cable, and the kite balloon plunged with the speed of its descent. It could not, however, escape its doom. A stream of lead left the trio of guns as the scout dived, catching the balloon fairly. The observer leaped for safety, and a moment later the "sausage" fell to earth a blazing mass.

With the few cartridges which remained to him the pilot annoyed the infantry as he flew home. The fusilade from the trenches passed him untouched, and a few minutes after the last of his flock he landed on the aerodrome.

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22

ANNOYING THE BOCHE

BOMBERS have their share of excitement as well as their faster brothers, the scouts. When the two act together things are bound to happen.

Two squadrons of bombers set out to destroy a Hun aerodrome; they took with them two squadrons of scouts to engage any German machine which might dare to attack, or any machine-guns on the ground which attempted to interfere with the work of the bombers.

The objective was reached without incident, and then the day's work commenced. First the hangars were treated to a salvo of 25-lb. bombs, and by the smoke which arose from the shattered remains it seemed that these were effective. Then the officers' mess and workshops were treated to a shower, and the landing ground sprinkled with explosive. By this time pillars of smoke arose from all quarters, and the machine-guns were beginning to get busy.

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This gave the scouts their opportunity to take a hand in the game, and they cheerfully flew around at a height of only a few hundred feet, pouring streams of bullets into hangars, huts, and buildings indiscriminately.

Things were beginning to look rather uninteresting when a tiny scout was brought out on to the aerodrome, the pilot vainly hoping to ascend and attack the huge formation which was pounding the aerodrome to bits. Before he could do more than have his engine started one of the leaders of the raid dived like a bolt out of the blue until within a few feet of the earth, and at a range of ten feet poured in a burst of lead. The scout crumpled up, absolutely shot to pieces, the petrol tank catching fire, and burning up the remains.

One by one the machine-guns on the aerodrome were silenced until no opposition arose from the ruined place, and the raid leader decided to return. Before leaving he descended close to the ground and took stock of the damage which had been done. One hundred and four 25-lb. bombs had been dropped, six hangars were on fire, two were blown to pieces. How many machines were destroyed he could not see,

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but subsequent events showed that at least sixteen were set on fire. The officers' mess had three holes in the roof, and from a large building in the rear of the hangars two pillars of smoke ascended with the flames which enveloped the walls. Even at an altitude of ten thousand feet the smoke was still encountered.

Feeling satisfied as to results, the leader signed for his formation to withdraw, and in good order, marshalled by the scouts, the machines left for home.

Their journey was not, however, to be made in the same serenity as the outward trip. Hardly had they left the scene of their labours when a large formation of German scouts appeared in the sky, and pilots and observers looked to their guns and prepared for action. The British machines did not wait for the Huns to take the initiative, but a dozen of the escort detached themselves from the rest of the formation, and rushed to meet the enemy.

It is hard to describe a battle in the air between two large formations. Separate machines are lost to sight in the whirling mass of planes, and gradually the combat straightens out and settles down into individual battles, until one side suffers a

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few casualties, and the dog-fight recommences. Out of the mass two machines fell earthwards, locked in a death grip. They were German machines, the pilots of which had misjudged their distances, and collided; the pilot must fly to an inch when fighting in formation.

Then the two sides settled down. Here three scouts bearing the mark of the Iron Cross attacked one solitary machine with the red, white, and blue rings. Another scout rushed to its aid, but even as it joined in the fray the three Huns became two, as the third fell to earth in flames. Circling, zooming, looping, side-slipping—the air seemed full of a chaos of tiny fighters, all rushing hither and thither at speeds of over a hundred miles an hour. Then another Hun fell earthwards, the planes folding back, a crumpled mass. A moment later a British machine spun to earth, the pilot hit, and trying to avoid further combat. A Hun dashed after him to finish his victory, but in the midst of the dive a stream of lead caught him, and he passed his would-be victim, a blazing mass of flames.

Meanwhile the formation had drawn farther and farther away. Then, as it crossed the lines, another body of scouts

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detached themselves, and returned to the help of their comrades.

The Huns hesitated. Already having the worst of the battle, they did not wait for more, but as the reinforcements approached, with one accord put down their noses and fled for home.

For their part, the British machines were running short of petrol, so swung round and followed their charges into safety.

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23

RESCUED!

HARD at work firing at an Albatross scout, the pilot did not notice the arrival of a fresh enemy, and it was only when the pilot of the Pfalz machine sent a burst of bullets through his planes that he realised that the dice were loaded against him.

Two to one is heavy odds in the air, but the pilot gallantly carried on though he had little expectation of coming through alive. Then a lucky burst wounded one of the Hun pilots, and he followed up his advantage, careless of the manœuvres of the later arrival. The pilot of the Albatross put his machine into a spin, but the British pilot dived after him, waited until he was within thirty yards of his adversary's tail, and then pressed the triggers of his guns. Shot to pieces, the Albatross collapsed. The planes fell apart from the fuselage, and the remains whirled rapidly to earth.

Unfortunately, this success proved the pilot's undoing, for during his dive he had

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so completely ignored the Pfalz scout that the latter had found time to take up an ideal position, and then, as the British scout pulled out of his victorious dive, the Boche poured in a murderous fire. Luckily the pilot was not hit, but the greater part of the burst caught the engine and propeller. With a few spasmodic explosions the engine ceased to function, and, staring sadly at his splintered propeller, the pilot put down the nose of his machine, hoping against hope but expecting every moment to see his planes collapse, his tank burst into flames, or feel the final shots of his enemy as he finished off the combat. He stared down at the lines below, wondering where his scout would crash. He judged that the pieces would fall just behind the German lines.

So occupied was he with these thoughts that he did not notice the arrival of another British scout, but when the shots which he expected did not come he turned his head to see what had become of his adversary. At that precise moment the Hun was going through a very bad time, having been surprised before he could complete his first victory. Even as the pilot looked he saw the shots of his rescuer going home; then

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the Pfalz burst into flames, and fell blazing to the ground.

By this time the British scout was close to the earth, and the pilot looked about him for a good spot to land. He pulled up safely about a hundred yards behind the trenches, and climbed out of his machine without any idea of what he proposed doing next. The *whack* of a bullet close beside him made him realise that his thinking had better be done under cover, and he dropped to earth to consider his position.

Help was, however, at hand. As he noticed a party leave the trenches to take him prisoner he saw a speck swoop out of the sky, scatter the Huns, and land before his amazed eyes. Hardly realising what he did he rushed to the waiting machine whilst the pilot kept the Huns at bay with his machine-gun, climbed up, seated himself astride the fuselage, holding on to the struts with both hands, and a few minutes later crossed the trenches, caring not a jot for the inferno of fire which was poured around him.

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24

OVER THE NORTH SEA

As the twilight began to fall over the countryside the huge doors of the iron shed were slowly levered back and the form of the giant airship exposed to view. At first glance she appeared an exact copy of the infamous Zeppelin type, and indeed was not far removed from the airships which at one time appeared with fair frequency over our coasts. She was a monster nearly 200 yards long.

One by one the crew climbed up the companion and disappeared in the forward car, distributing themselves in their correct stations in the body of the vessel. The captain remained below until the whole body of the rigid had emerged into the open, and when she floated steadily a few feet from the ground, held down by men who grasped the ropes which hung from the framework, climbed in also, gave orders for the release of the necessary ballast, and the hauling in of the ropes, and then,

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as the rigid rose steadily in the evening air, moved a lever in the forward cabin. A moment later the forward engine started up with a roar, and gradually the huge bulk gained way, moving slowly over the ground.

As the speed increased a turn of the wheel moved the elevators; the nose of the airship rose and the outlines of fields and hedges gradually receded farther and farther below.

Night was drawing on as the sea was reached. The stars began to shine, and the outline of the coast grew dimmer. Then a course was set, and the captain commenced his tour of the ship before turning in for a few hours' sleep and handing over the charge of the vessel to one of his juniors.

To leave the forward car where he had been standing so far he had to climb a frail aluminium ladder, pass close by the revolving propeller, over part of the body of the ship, and through another gap into the narrow keel. A false step at this part of the journey would have meant instant death either from the huge propeller or from the fall to the sea hundreds of feet below.

Once inside the keel matters were easier. Here a gangway led from one part of the

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airship to another, a frail pathway less than a foot in width, hanging from the framework above, and enclosed merely by thin fabric. But here again a false step would mean death, there being nothing beyond the fabric to prevent a fall into space.

One after another he visited the stations in the vessel. Navigating car, wireless cabin, engine rooms, gun platforms—all were visited and found correct. At each place well-trained men were attending to their duties or keenly on the lookout for all that passed on the sea below.

Once during his rounds a light flared out from a drifter. A quick telephone message to another part of the ship, and an answering signal appeared far forward. Had the signal not been noticed the drifter would probably have opened fire, for the airship was not distinguishable at night from a raiding Zeppelin.

All being well, he gave his second in command the necessary instructions, and stretched himself on the floor of the cabin amidships. It was quiet here, for the noise from the forward engine which alone sufficed to keep cruising speed on the vessel, was barely heard. A moment later he slept soundly.

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The first watch proved uneventful, and when he was aroused to take over again the greyness of early morning was already overcoming the darkness. Glancing around him he noticed the sprawling forms of some of the crew, resting at the time, but ready at a moment's notice to spring to their stations. One man, whose head lay comfortably on a huge bomb which stood ready for use the instant a submarine was sighted, smiled in his sleep. It was a grim smile, and by the movements of his hands he appeared to be fighting his Lewis gun in dreamland.

A breeze had arisen during the last few hours, ruffling the surface of the sea, and causing the ship to roll a little. His second in command had nothing to report, and went off to sleep as the captain took charge. He glanced out of the port in the side of the car. Away to the left the coast showed dimly in the greyness. A few small boats moved upon the sea—drifters and mine-sweepers, coastal motor-boats and destroyers, all intent upon their work.

So far little of interest had occurred. Nothing had been seen to report, the wireless messages received during the night had consisted chiefly of weather forecasts and

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details as to the speed of the wind, and no sign of a submarine had broken the monotony.

As he gazed below he suddenly saw a long dark shadow appear on the water, growing gradually every moment more distinct. It broke water ahead, and to one side of him. Hastily he shouted an order to the helmsman, and as the vessel swung round set the bells ringing in the engine-room and cabins. Every man sprang to his post, drums of ammunition were placed on the guns and bombs held in readiness for release. Then, as the submarine came directly below the airship, and almost as the bombs were about to be dropped for her destruction, the captain realised that the boat was British and swung off disgustedly. He had lost the chance of an absolute "sitter," and almost felt like bombing our own submarine in his disgust. His particular ship already had several U-boats to her credit, but she was several points behind some others of her class.

Glancing at the clock he saw that they had already been seven hours in the air, and as broad daylight had appeared and home was far away he decided to return. Round swung the huge vessel in a wide circle, and set her nose for the aerodrome.

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When at length land was reached the sun was shining and the fields full of workers who glanced up in surprise at the mammoth of the air as she sped over them at a speed of more than sixty miles an hour.

The long sheds at last came in sight, with a squad of men waiting patiently for the arrival of the airship. A wireless message had been sent out warning the station of the home-coming, and all was prepared for her reception. A short distance from the sheds the engines were stopped, the gas valves opened, and the airship began to sink. Then the huge propellers were swung to the horizontal, and the engines switched on, so that the mooring ropes soon came within reach of the waiting men. Then the engines stopped, and the landing party slowly towed the monster into the shelter of the sheds where she was made fast.

Not till then did the crew leave the ship, and walk, weary-eyed, to the mess for their breakfast.

"What luck?" asked the landing officer.

The captain only scowled. A blank voyage after over ten hours in the air through the darkness of the night is not conducive to good temper.

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25

STRAFING "SAUSAGES"

DESTROYING kite-balloons is thought by many people to come under the category of "soft jobs," but when the kite-balloon is protected by a strong formation of enemy scouts the job ceases to be "cushy."

The British patrol crossed the trenches on business intent. Their purpose was to proceed far over the lines and then catch stray Huns, but if a hostile patrol were encountered, so much the better for the squadron bag. Numbers made little difference; it was the spirit which evened up the odds. When the leader saw the portly "sausage" swaying in the air, its crew hard at work observing for German guns, he thought a diversion might be created and promptly dived for the balloon. The fact that eight German scouts barred the way mattered little to him. He had made up his mind to bag the "sausage," and if all the scouts in Germany had been present he would have charged down at the straining envelope.

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Straight through the formation he dashed, disregarding the fire from the eight Huns. His formation could be trusted to deal with them; he wanted to strafe the balloon, and made straight for the objective.

When the Huns realised that he had passed their barrage, they immediately commenced winding on the cable, and the envelope began to fall. They were, however, too late. The pilot pushed down the nose of his machine and pressed the triggers of his guns. A stream of lead poured into the bulging mass, the observers jumped overboard, trusting to their parachutes, and the balloon plunged downwards emitting flames and smoke.

So far so good, but the leader had to return to his patrol. When he turned from the blazing balloon he saw that a fresh formation of Huns had approached, and that his little flock was vastly outnumbered. He dashed to their help, throwing himself into the fray already flushed with his recent victory. Two Huns rushed to meet him. Eluding one by a quick turn, he zoomed, side-slipped, and came out nicely under the tail of the other. A burst from his gun, and the planes of the scout collapsed. A moment later he was in the thick of the fight. He

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saw at a glance that it was hopeless to continue the combat. He had not lost any machines, and three of the German scouts had already gone to their account, but in the distance yet another patrol was fast approaching, and he felt that he could honourably withdraw. Little by little he gathered the machines about him and slipped closer and closer to the line until the proximity of the trenches warned the Huns that it would be unwise to cross into British territory and they turned back.

The leader took his machines out of sight, but just as he thought of returning to the aerodrome he caught a glimpse of a fat body ascending slowly above the horizon. Abandoning his patrol to the leadership of his second in command, he immediately turned about and once more charged straight at the newly-risen kite-balloon. Balloons were to him as a red rag to a bull. He could never glut his appetite on them.

Once more the protecting formation of Huns came at him. If they recognised him alone, doubtless they wondered what had become of his flock. His state of single blessedness attracted them, for they were still smarting under their recent defeat and the loss of three of their number. It

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was at this moment that the British pilot showed his guile. Turning tail he pretended to bolt from the on-coming Huns. Up went the nose of his machine, and a minute later he had vanished in a handy cloud. Several of the Huns followed, others remained below, waiting for him to emerge. They did not know—how could they ?—that the pilot had taken a very careful compass bearing of the position of their charge, and that cloud flying was child's play to him. So they waited, confident that their prey would at last reappear and fall an easy victim to their guns.

Once in the cloud the pilot turned. Steadily east he flew, judging his time. Then, when he calculated that the moment was ripe, he dived through the cloud and came out right over the now defenceless balloon. Once more he poured out a stream of bullets, again two frightened observers leaped into space, and for the second time that afternoon a balloon burst into flames.

Seeing no more balloons on the sky-line, the pilot turned and swept homewards, several thousand feet under his waiting enemies.

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26

BEHIND THE FORMATION

Good formation means safety in the air. A machine which drops behind the rest of the flight lays itself open to attack by the Huns who are always hovering about, waiting to destroy any stragglers from the body of aeroplanes which they are afraid to approach too closely. Not only does the pilot stand little chance of being helped by his comrades, but even if the hostile machines do not come near, there is always the watchful " Archie " waiting to throw his shells upwards on a good target. It may be engine trouble or merely bad flying on the part of the pilot, but in nine times out of ten to lose formation means trouble for the machine and its occupants.

Whilst returning from a raid, the machine which brought up the end of the tail of the V formation, suddenly commenced to have trouble with its engine. Gradually the revolutions dropped, and try as he would the pilot was unable to make it pick up again. It

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did not actually give out altogether, but gradually lost power, and consequently the aeroplane lost speed, and the rest of the formation gradually drew ahead. The pilot was not greatly troubled. He was experienced and so was his observer, and the lines were only a few miles off. As yet, too, the sky was devoid of any suspicious black specks which might mean enemy aircraft. "Archie," moreover, was quiet, so altogether there seemed little really to worry about.

It was the observer who first discerned the approaching formation of Fokker biplanes, not the Fokkers of Immelmann's time, back in 1916, but the latest Fokker scouts, one of the fastest and best of all the types of aircraft which Germany possesses. For a time it seemed as though the Huns had not seen the lonely British bomber, or if it had been sighted, probably they thought it seemed so helpless that it was but the bait to a trap, and if they attacked a cloud of British scouts would come about their ears. Gradually the formation from which the machine had become detached, pulled farther and farther away towards home. Then the Huns swung round and came towards the bomber.

The pilot glanced at his observer. The

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observer shrugged his shoulders. It seemed there was to be a fight, and the odds were at least twenty to one—twenty fast, well-armed, fighting scouts to one comparatively slow bomber. The two had come safely through many fights, but never had they been against such odds before. However, flight was out of the question with a failing engine, and neither of the officers felt inclined to drop out of the fight by shamefully copying the Huns and spinning to earth. The observer jammed a drum of ammunition on his gun and saw that others were handy in their racks. The pilot tenderly fingered his Vickers, tried once again to get a few more revolutions out of the failing engine, and then settled himself more firmly in his seat and prepared to do his best—or his worst—so far as the on-coming Huns were concerned.

For a time the German machines hung about in the vicinity but did not attack or come within range. They still suspected a trap, and were timid folk at the best of times. Meanwhile the two-seater gradually drew closer and closer to home. All of a sudden the fun started.

At a signal from their leader the whole formation charged, and when within range, commenced firing from all quarters. In

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that inferno of whistling death it seemed impossible that either pilot or observer could live. Holes appeared in the planes, splinters flew from the struts, the petrol tank narrowly escaped damage. The observer reserved his fire until the leader of the attack was within about fifty yards of him. Then he took careful aim, and poured a burst from his gun into his adversary. For a moment nothing happened. Then, suddenly a puff of smoke was blown clear of the machine by the draught from the propeller, and a moment later red flames gushed out and the scout plunged to earth, a seething mass of fire. The other Huns paused in their attack. The loss of their leader disconcerted them; the victim was not so easy to secure as they had imagined.

The little respite made the pilot think. Even though in such overwhelming superiority as regards numbers, it was evident that the Germans were not too courageous. Before they could recover from their hesitancy, the pilot swung round the two-seater, and charged into their midst, firing hard as he came. The Huns scattered before his mad rush, but once more a burst went home, and another foe fell whirling to the ground, one plane falling from the

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machine in the mad descent. Then the bomber was headed for home again, and the observer's turn came once more. Using his gun with care he judiciously fired at machine after machine as the Germans tried to resume their formation, turning them from their paths, causing the confusion to continue. And all the time the pilot headed for the trenches.

Numbers were, however, not to be denied, and presently the converging fire of three scouts caught the bomber just behind the observer's seat. A little better judgment and the storm of bullets would have killed both pilot and observer or put the engine right out of action. As it was, both officers were unharmed, but the elevator controls were cut and the machine had to find her own angle of descent. As luck had it she dropped her nose a little, falling into a fairly steep dive, and remained at that angle. The pilot throttled back his engine, and the fight continued. Once more the observer got in a burst, and a third Hun left the combat, badly damaged, but still under control. Then the observer was hit. The bullet took him fairly in the shoulder, glanced against the shoulder blade, and ripped open his back. For a moment a red mist swam

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before his eyes, then he pulled himself together and continued the fight. The pilot fired as opportunities offered themselves.

A moment later and the end nearly came. Whilst correcting a slight jam in the gun, the pilot saw the course of a flaming tracer bullet. It passed through the plane and entered the main petrol tank. He stared at the hole, from which poured the fuel, expecting every minute to see the blaze of fire. Then his momentary stupor vanished. He jumped to his feet, and leaving the machine to her own devices, tore up his linen-covered map and rammed it into the hole. The leak stopped, and the danger from fire was over for the time. He glanced round at the observer for approval just as that worthy took his third and fourth wounds. He was bleeding copiously, he could hardly see for the red stream which poured from a gashed forehead, the pain from his torn shoulder was intolerable, but he still fought on, changing his drums of ammunition and firing burst after burst as a scout crossed his sights. Almost mechanically he took a bead and pressed the trigger, but the wide berth given to his arc of fire showed the respect the Huns had conceived for his shooting.

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A burst of bullets on the instrument board made the pilot start. It was a narrow shave, and destroyed his revolution meter and aneroid. However, he could do without them. Indeed, at the time he did not think he would need either of them again. Then a bullet scarred his leather coat, and he swerved and zig-zagged to throw his assailant off the track. The air seemed full of whirling machines. It seemed impossible to fire and miss. Bullet after bullet tore through the wires. Planes were severed, broken ribs gauntly poked through the torn fabric, and a thin stream of blood from the wounded observer trickled along the sloping floor of the fuselage towards the pilot. The sight maddened him, and he longed to wipe out all his enemies. Once more he swerved round and rushed at his foes. Again the Huns scattered before his rush, and once more he swung round and made for the lines.

Help came at last in the form of a cloud which showed up to the left. Banking his machine, the pilot ruddered her into the white vapour. For perhaps half a minute they dived through the damp mass before once more emerging into clear air. And then they were for a while hidden from their enemies. The Huns might follow, but

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they would probably come out of the cloud in a different part of the sky. All the while the trenches became closer and closer.

Some few minutes later three Huns came into sight about a mile away. They rapidly overhauled the helpless British machine and recommenced firing. One burst caught the unfortunate observer, inflicting six more wounds in his legs. This proved too much for him, and he fell forward in his seat in a faint. As his gun ceased to spurt defiance at his enemies, they grew bolder and closed to short range. The pilot saw them coming, and realised that the last chance was gone. Determined to die fighting he again turned on his foes, and with almost his last burst of ammunition had the satisfaction of bringing down another.

As he idly watched it flutter like a broken bird to earth, and waited for the end, be became aware that the continuous fire had ceased. He looked round in wonder, and saw the Huns retreating. Casting his eyes about the sky for the cause of their sudden departure he saw coming over the lines a strong formation of British machines. The Huns had seen them and fled.

Down below were the trenches, and the machine still dived swiftly earthwards.

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It was a rotten end to a good fight, to be killed in the crash of landing, but the pilot realised that the wreckage would fall in British territory, and that gave him some consolation. The ground came rapidly towards him. Anyhow the unconscious observer would not feel the crash. Then the bump came. A tearing crash, flying splinters of ribs and spars, a confused medley of iron and escaping petrol, and then oblivion.

* * * * * * *

"Now, don't worry yourself. You are all right. Drink this." The pilot weakly did as he was told, and tried to speak.

The nurse saw the questioning in his eyes, and answered the unspoken question.

"You've had an accident, and are in the hospital at X——. You will be all right in a few weeks."

His lips moved weakly, and she bent down to catch his whispered words.

"Oh, he'll be better before you are. None of his wounds is serious. The one which hit the shoulder was worst, but the bone isn't broken. Now you go to sleep. You mustn't talk any more."

Wearily the pilot closed his eyes, but he soon smiled in his sleep.

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27

IN THE NICK OF TIME

THE infantry were hard pressed. For hours they had endured the heavy shelling which preludes an attack, and then, wave upon wave, the assaulting lines of grey-clad Huns had poured from their trenches across No Man's Land. Three times had the lads in khaki hurled them back, twice with rapid rifle and machine-gun fire. On the third occasion the Huns had penetrated almost into the trenches, but with a shout the defenders had leaped out and driven them back with the bayonet.

For a time all was quiet as the Boche prepared for another effort, and during the pause the C.O. took stock of his ammunition. Supplies were perilously low, and he went into a well-protected dug-out and 'phoned through to the rear for supplies to be sent up.

A thin voice answered him.

"Impossible, the enemy's barrage is too heavy, and no one could get through alive.

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You must hold on at all costs. If your portion of the line gives the whole of this front will be threatened."

The Colonel went back to the trenches, determined to hold on whilst a man remained, but he sighed as he thought of the lives which must be lost owing to lack of ammunition. A tense feeling of suspense hung over all his men, but he cheered them as he took his way along the line.

Suddenly his ear caught the sound of an engine, the hum of an aeroplane as it passed over the battle. The C.O. looked up; the noise seemed very close. As he looked he saw machine after machine come along the line, flying so close to the ground that their under-carriages barely cleared the parapet. And from each machine leaned an officer who dropped parcel after parcel into the trenches, until the whole line had been thickly strewn with packages. One fell at the Colonel's feet. He picked it up curiously, wondering what it might contain. As his fingers closed around it his face became eager, and he tore at the string and wrappers, and there, in his hand lay *cartridges*, the one thing in all the world his soul then longed for.

Quickly the word was passed along, and

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all the packages were collected and distributed among the battalion. A look of relief came into the faces of the men as they handled the familiar cylinders.

Then the storm burst again. A grey line leaped from the opposite trenches with confidence in its bearing. The German commanders had guessed the shortage of ammunition in the British lines. But their triumph was short lived. Before they could reach the wire their lines were cut to pieces by the rapid fire of the British troops, and the Huns fell back again, astonished and beaten.

That was how the Royal Air Force saved their comrades in the trenches.

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28

WHAT HAPPENED IN TEN MINUTES

THINGS happen quickly in the air. No sooner had the two scouts crossed the lines than they saw a formation composed of Albatross and Halberstadt machines some two thousand feet above them. Both pilots saw the approaching Huns at the same time, and though the odds were at least six to one neither thought of flight.

The British machines drew first blood, and a German scout went down in flames to crash thousands of feet below. In the maze of whirling aeroplanes there was little room for clever manœuvring. Rather each pilot charged at the nearest foe, pouring out a stream of lead from his guns. One of them singled out the leader, and stuck to him with grim determination, pouring in burst after burst, driving his foe down lower and lower. When he was clear of the fight and about to make an end of the Hun two other scouts dived from the formation, and a shower of bullets played about his machine.

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A dull blow in the leg, an aching pain, and the loss of control in that limb made him realise that he was badly hit.

Leaving the leader he suddenly swung round in a steep climbing turn, got the machine of the Hun who had wounded him exactly on the Aldis sights, and pressed the triggers of both guns. The converging fire struck the Hun fairly about the centre section, both planes collapsed, and the broken remains whirled downwards.

The pilot then climbed to the assistance of his comrade, who was being sorely pressed. The damaged leg handicapped him severely, but he was able to command his machine. As he shot upwards he saw a third Hun fall to earth emitting flames and smoke, and knew that when the inevitable end came he and his companion would have rendered a good account of themselves in their last fight.

Into the whirling dog-fight he dashed again, charging straight at a German who was about to pour in a heavy fire on his companion, and causing him to swerve away and so give the British pilot a little respite.

A moment later a fourth Albatross went down out of control, and then the end came.

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Suddenly, for no apparent reason, the Hun scouts whipped round and fled for home. Glancing behind him the pilot saw in the distance six British scouts approaching. But even as he looked his own doom threatened. The last Hun, noticing the momentary distraction of the British pilot, flew straight at him, banked, turned, got into position under his tail, and carefully sighted his gun, determined to make an end of one of the British pilots before flying for safety. There appeared no hope. The pain in the pilot's leg made it impossible for him to twist and turn, and so escape his foe. All he wished for was a quick death. Then he saw out of the corner of his eye the rush of his companion. Straight at his foe flew the British pilot, his gun mute, engine roaring fiercely. Then came a sickening crash, a burst of flame, and the two machines fell together to earth.

All this happened in about ten minutes—but how can a man die better than in giving his life for his friend ?

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29

LUCK OF THE AIR

FORTUNE favours the brave. This saying is especially true of those who live in the air.

The two-seater ambled along, some ten thousand feet in the sky, whilst the pilot gazed about him, keeping watch for the approach of the enemy, and the observer, his eyes glued to the ground, made marks and notes on his map as one incident after another presented itself to him from the world below. Their bus was a reconnaissance machine, slow as aeroplanes go these days, and armed for protection, not attack. The duty of its occupants was to find out things and bring back the information for the use of the Staff, not to strafe Huns unless a combat were forced on them.

When the flight was nearly over, and the observer already folding up his maps and notebook, he was caused to look up by a rock from side to side of the machine. This was the way in which the pilot drew

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his attention to any matter worthy of consideration. On this occasion he looked up and saw a formation of German scouts. They were some distance off, but it was hopeless to dream of reaching the line before they were overtaken. It behoved both of them to look to their guns. Twelve to one were big odds, but they determined to put up a good fight, and give the Hun more than he asked for.

Things went badly from the first. As soon as the enemy opened fire his shots took effect. One burst carried away the aileron controls, and almost immediately afterwards one of the petrol tanks was pierced. A moment later the speed of the propeller lessened, the pilot perforce dipped the nose of his machine, and they appeared at the mercy of the Huns.

Fortunately, at this moment, a diversion was created by the arrival in the distance of a small formation of four British machines. Instantly the Huns, thinking that they still had a sufficiently overpowering advantage, moved off their main body to attack the new-comers, leaving two of their number to finish off the badly damaged two-seater.

The two scouts dived at their unfortunate foe, propellers whirling in the sunlight.

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So rapidly did they drop that the foremost pilot underestimated his distance, and before he could pull out of the dive, had shot past his opponent. The second Hun saw how matters had fared with his companion, and pulled out in time. This gave the British airmen their chance. With a foe ahead and a foe behind, and guns pointing in both directions, they might be depended on to make the most of it. Pilot and observer fired simultaneously, as both Huns wheeled to get out of their dangerous positions. They were, however, too late. A burst of bullets from the forward gun caught the over-eager Boche fairly about the engine and petrol tank. The machine wavered, then the nose dropped, and as she commenced to spin, flames burst out from the pierced tank.

His work finished, the pilot turned to see how the observer was faring. He had heard the crackle of his gun, but his own affair had not permitted him to interfere with the other combat. He was just in time to see the end. As he turned his head the observer's shots took effect, completely shooting off one of the planes from the scout. Whirling rapidly the Hun plunged to earth.

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Then, with time to attend to such matters, the observer calmly stepped from his seat, and holding on to the wires and stays, proceeded to plug the pierced tank. From a broken murmur the note of the engine changed to a mighty roar, the nose of the machine rose proudly in the air, and as the observer wrote his final notes in the book, the pilot guided the old two-seater over the lines, through the storm of "Archies," whose gunners had probably witnessed the whole affair, and back safely to the aerodrome.

Their luck had certainly held good that day.

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30

A SITTER

BACKWARDS and forwards flew the reconnaissance machine as it spotted for the artillery. The pilot wearily turned and twisted, dipped and zoomed as he manœuvred in figures of eight, ever trying to dodge the shells thrown at him by "Archie," whilst the observer, his eyes glued on the target, tapped short messages and corrections to the battery of heavies miles away in the rear. Two targets had been observed, and the fire of the guns accurately directed, and now the third and last was slowly being pounded away.

At last the observer's work was finished, and he sent down the signal which being interpreted meant "I am returning to landing ground." Then he touched the weary pilot on the shoulder and motioned for him to leave the game of Devil's Tig, and head the old bus back to the aerodrome. The pilot smiled and gladly obeyed. Over went the rudder, up banked the plane, as the

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machine swung round in a short circle. Even the engine seemed to know they were homeward bound, and purred in a contented fashion. Three targets knocked out in the course of a morning was not bad work, and both pilot and observer thought contentedly of the mess lunch and a good game of tennis to pass away the afternoon.

As the pilot straightened up the aeroplane and headed her for the trenches his eye caught sight of a tiny speck which rapidly approached from the British side of the line. He knew it at once for one of our scouts, and was about to pass on and think no more of the matter, when out of the clouds, which hung low over the country that day, he saw another speck fall with startling rapidity, making straight for the British scout. The pilot of the latter machine did not perceive his enemy at first, and probably the first warning he got of his approach was a shower of lead through his planes. Anyhow, he carried on until the Hun was almost on top of him before he swerved out of the way. Then commenced a single combat, such as might have taken place—under different conditions—five hundred years ago. Both machines were very evenly matched, but the German

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had the advantage of the initiative. Bank, twist, zoom, loop, stall as he might, neither scout was able to get into a position from which he could safely rake his foe.

At first the pilot of the reconnaissance machine had not turned from his course. He took it for granted that a few minutes would witness an abrupt end to the fight, with the Hun either going down emitting flames and smoke, or steeply spiralling into safety, but as the minutes went by he gradually realised that the British pilot was far from having the best of it. He therefore determined to take a hand in matters himself, and swung the two-seater off her course, steering into the fight. So occupied was the Hun in his efforts to get on the tail of the scout that he failed to notice the other machine coming towards him, climbing steeply all the while. When the pilot had gained sufficient height and was well over the fight, he pushed down the nose of his machine and dived at the Hun. When within about twenty yards he pressed the trigger of his gun. "Rat-tat-tat-tat" went the gun, firing through the propeller. Then it abruptly ceased. The pilot savagely jerked the cocking handle, and again pressed the trigger, but the gun had

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jammed. Worse, he had merely scared off the Hun without damaging his machine at all. As the scout turned and fled for safety, the pilot banked up his machine without putting on any rudder, and whilst she side-slipped swiftly earthwards the observer swung over his gun and fired a hasty burst at the retreating Boche.

The diversion created had enabled the British scout to reach a better place, and he rushed to cut off the retreating Hun. Finding his passage blocked, the Hun came back once more and charged at the two-seater. Once more the pilot waited, and at the right moment side-slipped steeply, and the observer poured in another burst. This was better aimed than the first, and the lines of tracer bullets could be distinctly seen as they pierced the planes of the scout.

Finding things too hot, the Hun dived for safety, but his retreat was again cut off by the arrival of another scout, which had seemingly appeared from nowhere. Seeing that there was no hope, the Boche resolved to die fighting, and if possible to carry at least one of his foes to death with him. The two-seater was obviously the most suitable victim, and upon this machine he

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concentrated all his energies. Ignoring the fire of the two scouts the Hun charged again and again at the reconnaissance machine. Each time he got within range the pilot side-slipped out of his line of fire. Quick as thought the Hun doubled back after the slower machine, but even as he turned the observer got him. A long burst was poured into the scout. The German pilot was evidently hit, for he now steered erratically, the scout swaying and turning badly. A minute later the observer got in another burst, shooting the rudder clean away.

Seeing the Hun helpless, the two British scouts drew off to await the end. The two-seater had borne the brunt of the fight; let the clumsier machine gain the full credit of bagging a victim.

The end soon came. This time it was the British machine which charged at the helpless Hun. When close beside his prey the pilot again side-slipped and at a range of about ten yards the observer sighted carefully and then pressed the trigger. The shots took the Hun fairly about the centre section, and all four planes collapsed. The petrol tank caught fire, and the remains fell to earth a whirling, burning mass.

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Once more the pilot headed back to the aerodrome. Three shoots and a fight with a scout was quite enough for anyone.

They landed and both climbed out. For a moment neither of them spoke. Then the pilot smiled.

"Rather like baby-killing," he remarked.

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31

THE LOW RECONNAISSANCE

Low reconnaissance, with its corollary of attacking troops on the ground, is one of the latest developments of aerial warfare. For these expeditions two-seaters are usually chosen, though scouts have done excellent work. A large supply of ammunition and a full load of bombs are carried, and pilot and observer set out to annoy the Hun and damage his communications as much as possible. Sometimes the actual first line and communication trenches are attacked, but more usually the roads immediately in the rear of the trenches are the happy hunting ground of the aviator.

A certain two-seater was wandering along the back lines looking for work, when the pilot saw in the distance a long string which might be anything, but which to his practised eye seemed very like a convoy of lorries. He decided to drop down a bit and look closer, and found that his surmise was correct. On this occasion he decided

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not to call the attention of the gunners to the target, and drew off a little to confer with his observer. That worthy agreed with his plan of action, and the machine was again steered towards the distant lorries which trundled along serenely in a cloud of dust.

At this point the aeroplane seemed to attract the attention of the troops on the ground—probably the lorries were bringing up ammunition, or necessary supplies of some sort—and a strong opposition was set up. "Archie" depressed himself as much as possible, and coughed out clouds of dark brown smoke, seeking to blow the invader to bits. Machine-guns turned their stuttering voices skywards, and even the men in the trenches pointed their rifles against the on-coming machine. Nothing daunted, the pilot held on; he was used to these displays of impotent anger from below, and nothing less than a direct hit would have turned him from his course when he had made his mind up on a matter.

Meanwhile the observer was busy counting the lorries. There were fifteen in all, and he chuckled as he thought what a jumbled mess they would make a few minutes later.

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Then the pilot decided that the time for action had come. Putting down the nose of the machine, he opened out the engine and raced along the length of the convoy. Just as he was clearing the last vehicle he dropped his first bomb, the explosion overturning the two lorries which brought up the rear. The road blocked, the pilot returned, and again flew down the line. Retreat was impossible on account of the block in the road, and one after the other he dropped his packets of explosive amongst the turmoil. The first bomb hit the leading car fairly amidships, blowing it to pieces, overturning the next in line, and making a great hole in the road. The middle of the column was apparently occupied by ammunition transport, for the bombs caused explosions to which the preceding ones could not be compared. The whole earth seemed to shake with the violence of the detonations, and pieces of wood and metal were hurled high in the air. A cloud of dust and smoke spread over the wreckage, and for a while neither pilot nor observer could see more than a whirling maelström of confusion.

All this time "Archie" had been firing merrily, but nothing daunted, as soon as

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the smoke cleared sufficiently, the pilot once more went for the unfortunate convoy, both he and his observer pouring streams of lead into the struggling mass of men. Owing to the blockage at either end of the line it was impossible for the few lorries which had not been damaged to make good their escape, but the men who acted as drivers and escort fled before the hail of lead which rained down upon them.

Both thoroughly enjoying themselves, pumping out bullets as fast as they could place fresh drums of ammunition on the guns, neither of the airmen noticed the arrival of the three scouts. The first intimation they had of their presence was a stinging pain in the pilot's arm. He glanced up and saw the Hun swing away out of his arc of fire, and as he looked, a stream of lead from the two other machines pierced his planes close beside the observer's seat.

Now a sterner game commenced, and the destroyed convoy was left to work out its own salvation, if that were possible. "Archie" calmed down as the gunners awaited the fall of the daring reconnaissance machine, as though saying that he left the invaders a clean field and washed his hands of the whole matter.

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The Low Reconnaissance

The very closeness to the ground did not leave much chance for manœuvres. It seemed as though the British aeroplane must inevitably be shot down before the pilot could get into any position from which either gun could be fired, but as is often the case, luck favoured the bold. An over-confident Hun dived towards the side of the machine, trying to rake observer, pilot and engine. This gave the observer a chance. Swinging round, he waited until the Boche tried to steer clear, and then pressed the trigger of the gun. The stream of bullets must have caught the scout fairly in the centre section and made an excellent pattern, for all four planes suddenly collapsed, and the remains whirled earthwards.

However, two scouts left still made formidable odds, and the battle resolved itself into a chase, the wounded pilot endeavouring to dodge his aggressors and make for home, whilst the observer made what play he could with the machine-gun. How long this could have lasted it is impossible to say. The British machine might have escaped and might possibly have shot down another victim, but after a few minutes of the chase the observer's gun jammed. As the Huns took good care not to expose

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themselves to the fire of the forward gun, the chances of the Britishers did not seem worth betting on. But again luck favoured them. Either the two scouts had been in action before that day or they were carrying very little ammunition, for neither of them attacked again. They both circled about the two-seater without firing, and at last one approached within a few yards of the unworkable gun and signed that his ammunition belts were expended. Then both wheeled round and left for their aerodrome.

Again the fire from below burst out. Down went the nose of the machine, and as the pilot took her over the line back to the aerodrome he fired his last drum of cartridges into the grey-clad groups below.

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THE SPIRIT WHICH WINS

THE pilot had only been out from England for a few weeks when his chance came. This story tells how he took the opportunity, and added one more laurel to the wreath of the Royal Air Force.

Whilst flying over the lines harassing enemy troops who were massing for attack, dropping bombs on the groups of waiting men, and firing bursts of machine-gun fire into the communication trenches, the pilot was attacked by a large formation of German scouts. His machine was an old-fashioned fighter, whilst the Huns were flying scouts of their latest type. In addition the odds were eight to one, eight fast German machines armed with two machine-guns apiece, against one solitary, slow British aeroplane, carrying pilot and observer.

The first warning of danger was the concentrated fire of sixteen guns. Bullets played all about the planes, but no damage was done, and the pilot swung round the

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better to fight his foes. There appeared not the slightest hope that he and his observer would live through the affair, but both men determined to put up a stiff fight and give a good account of themselves before going under.

The Huns came on from all directions, pouring out bullets upon the fated machine. By skilful work the pilot swung round upon each scout in turn, and time after time the observer poured in bursts as opportunity offered. First blood was drawn by the Huns, the pilot being hit simultaneously in the leg and the arm. Almost at the same moment the first Hun crashed; a well-placed burst hit the machine in the centre section, just where the planes joined on to the fuselage, and the whole fabric collapsed and fell in pieces to the earth.

This caused the Huns to draw off and gave the pilot a moment's respite roughly to bandage his wounds before charging at the nearest foe. Another burst from the observer's gun and flames and smoke gushed out from the petrol tank of the stricken scout as it spun rapidly to earth. Again the pilot rushed at his enemies, but when he expected to hear the sound of his observer's gun nothing happened. He glanced

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round and saw his companion hanging limply in the seat with blood pouring down his face. For a moment the pilot felt fear, then he recovered, and determined to get it over and carry a third machine with him to death. Locked fast with a Hun he felt that he would die and not feel ashamed, but even as he banked to carry his plan into operation the sound of firing burst out again, and he knew that all was not over yet. The observer smiled wanly at him as he looked round and held up four fingers, pointing to various parts of his body. Apparently he had been momentarily stunned by a glancing bullet which had merely cut his forehead, and whatever were his three other wounds he was still able to carry on.

To gain breathing space the pilot put the machine into a spin and rapidly fell away from his assailants until he was only about three thousand feet from the ground. Then he flattened out and prepared to receive a fresh attack. During the pause his companion hastily bound up his injuries, placed a fresh drum of ammunition in position, and signified that he was ready for what might come.

Down dived the six scouts, breathing bullets. The loss of their two companions

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had made them wonder with whom they had to deal, and they came on cautiously, allowing time for the observer to draw a bead on the boldest of the formation, and send a third machine crashing to join the others below. Both pilot and observer felt a thrill of satisfaction. To destroy three out of eight scouts, any one of which was their superior, made them feel they had done their work, that life had been worth while. Death did not matter now.

And then the end came.

The converging fire of three guns caught the British machine fairly amidships. Three bullets hit the pilot, causing him to lose control of his aeroplane for a moment; two hit the observer; the majority pierced the petrol tank, and a moment later the whole engine seemed to burst into flames. For one minute the fighter rushed earthwards, as pilot and passenger sat helpless. Then the British pluck reasserted itself, and the pilot made his supreme effort.

Climbing out of the fuselage, away from the roaring flames, he stood for a moment on the quivering plane, noticing its many holes and the gaunt ribs peering through gaps in the fabric, then he grasped a strut firmly in one hand, planted his feet securely

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on the main spar, and leant over the controls, pulling the machine out of her headlong dive. The observer remained in his seat, for the flames did not yet touch him.

When the Germans saw that the fighter was once more under control, and that both passengers seemed to be alive, they again came to the attack. The observer gamely replied, firing his gun through an inferno of flames whilst the pilot stood in his perilous spot and side-slipped the machine to keep the flames blowing to one side and give the observer a chance to see his foes. At least one more Hun was hit, for a scout wavered and then left the combat, seeking home rather than turn again to face these seemingly charmed Englishmen.

And the fighter side-slipped to earth, the wind whistling through the wires, the flames roaring through the fabric of the planes, bearing two men, sharing between them eleven wounds, the victors of eight of their foes, the death of three.

Just before ground was reached the pilot flattened out and saved the crash. The charred machine fell to pieces in No Man's Land, and the pilot was thrown clear of the wreckage, whilst the observer was pinned down under the burning remains. Uncon-

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scious of his position the pilot struggled to his feet, and, ignoring the fire from machine-guns and rifles from the trenches went to the aid of his comrade. He dragged him clear of the flames, then fell to earth as his strength left him. Again he struggled to his feet and seized the helpless man, who had now fainted from pain and loss of blood, and attempted to place him in a more sheltered spot. As he dragged him painfully over the shell-torn ground he fell again, and as he collapsed a bomb thrown from the near-by trench exploded at his side. Splinters entered his already wounded body, but unconscious of all else but the danger to his friend he struggled on hands and knees, and with a last effort rolled the senseless body into the shelter of a shell hole. Then he fainted away.

When he recovered his senses he lay in the shelter of a dug-out whilst tender hands bandaged his hurts. Again he thought of his friend, and as he tried to give utterance to his words a feeble voice near by called out to him, and, happy in the knowledge that all was well, he allowed himself to drift off into oblivion.

When he next opened his eyes, some three days later, the bronze cross "For Valour" lay beside him.

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33

A DOUBLE EVENT

BACKWARDS and forwards flew the aeroplane, describing huge figures of eight in the air as the pilot signalled down corrections to the battery below. He was engaged in ranging a battery of heavies on to some German guns which had been giving a great deal of trouble to our troops in that area.

At last a direct hit was obtained, and he signalled for general battery fire. A moment later the gun emplacements were obscured in a huge cloud of smoke and dust, through which faint flashes showed the bursting shells. The din must have been terrible though unheard by the pilot on high. Gradually the smoke cleared, and the pilot, flying low, saw the utter destruction which had been wrought by our gunners. Emplacements were wrecked, guns overthrown and destroyed, the earth was torn and pitted all around, and the numbers of dead bodies testified to the accuracy of the British fire.

His work accomplished the pilot turned

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to go. He felt satisfied with his efforts and looked forward to a rest. In this he was, however, doomed to disappointment, for as the machine swung round an enemy fighter appeared out of the sky and dived at the British aeroplane.

The pilot glanced at his gun and saw that a drum of ammunition was in place. Then he awaited the arrival of his foe. A few seconds before the Hun came within effective range he banked his machine and swung out of the track of fire. As the fighter swept by, the British pilot loosed a burst from his machine-gun, spattering the planes of his opponent, but doing no damage.

Again the Hun charged. This time his shots went home, and a stinging pain in his leg made the pilot realise that he was hit. The damage was slight, and merely served to madden him. He set his teeth, and, as the Hun charged for the third time, did not attempt to get out of the way, but waited until a collision seemed imminent, then pressed the trigger of the gun and loosed a tornado of bullets straight into the vitals of the fighter.

The German machine staggered in the air. Slowly its nose dropped, and it commenced to spin. Faster grew the spin, the

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machine meanwhile falling vertically to earth. Then the strain grew too great for the planes to resist, and the aeroplane broke in pieces in the air, the engine and fuselage out-distancing the other parts in the race to earth.

Grimly the pilot watched the pieces fall. Then he bandaged up his leg, pointed the machine for home, and departed for his well-earned rest.

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34

BRITISH GRIT

WHEN the pilot and observer set out in the fighter to down an enemy kite balloon which was doing too much work for the German gunners, neither officer anticipated anything out of the ordinary.

They flew steadily towards the objective, intending, when within range, to fire several bursts of incendiary bullets, and then zoom over the "sausage," if necessary dropping a phosphorous bomb to complete the work of destruction. It seemed an easy job, not calling for any particular skill, and not involving much risk. Probably "Archie" would strafe, and possibly an enemy machine might put off to attack them, but both officers were confident of being able to deal with a Hun machine as well as the balloon.

The first part of the job went according to programme. Several bursts of tracer bullets were seen to strike the "sausage," but they failed to take effect. It was evident that the German observer saw the path of

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the tracers and signalled to those below to haul him down, for the balloon began to sink rapidly earthwards. As the pilot zoomed over the sinking gas-bag his observer swung round the rear gun and commenced firing further rounds into the envelope. This time the shots took effect; the balloon burst into flames, and the observer jumped overboard, when his parachute opened and carried him safely to earth.

So occupied were the two officers in watching the descent of the Hun that they forgot all about the possible second half of the programme, and when a German scout appeared on the scene neither of them observed its approach. The first intimation the pilot had of the presence of the enemy was a shower of bullets through the centre section, several of them narrowly missing himself. At the same time a shot just touched the observer's machine-gun, slightly damaging it, and putting it temporarily out of action. Whilst this was being repaired the pilot had both to manœuvre his machine and fight the scout alone. Try as he might he was utterly unable to get into a position from which he could deal with his enemy; all his time was occupied in preventing his faster and handier adversary from getting

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to the spot from which he could deal with the British aeroplane at his leisure. The Hun was a wary pilot and fully realised that only one gun was working, so he had no compunction about getting into a position where normally he would be under fire from the observer's weapon.

It was precisely this cuteness of the Hun that nearly proved his undoing, for after a while the observer succeeded in mending his gun and drew a bead on the scout whilst the German pilot was busily engaged in trying to fire successfully at the pilot and engine, meanwhile being quite oblivious to the fact that the observer was waiting his opportunity to put him out of the fight. The burst came at last, showering his planes with bullets and cutting an aileron control wire.

This somewhat equalised matters, for the Hun had now lost a large part of his powers of manœuvre, and though he was still superior in point of speed the British fighter was able to place himself in position for attack. According to the rules of the game the Hun should now have retired, returned to the aerodrome to have his control mended, and awaited a more favourable day. Unfortunately for himself he was made of stouter stuff than some of his fellows, and

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would not break off the combat. Time after time he charged down on his foe, poured out a burst and zoomed into the air above the fighter. Then he retired to a distance until he could turn in safety, and again charged at the fighter.

These rushes and bursts of fire could have continued indefinitely until both sides had exhausted all their ammunition, but after one or two repetitions the British pilot guessed from which particular disability the Hun was suffering and took steps to meet the situation. When the scout again charged down, he swung round his machine before the German zoomed, exposing his side to the enemy, but giving the observer a chance for a long burst of fire. The Hun took his chance. A shower of bullets poured into the machine, the control lever splintered in the very hands of the pilot, the observer felt a blow and a burning pain in his leg, and the Hun swept by. But before he passed out of range the observer seized the opportunity, brought his gun to bear on the foe, and fired in a long and sustained burst. First the scout wavered as the pilot lost control, then a cloud of smoke and a red flame burst from the stricken machine, and finally the

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planes collapsed, and the remains fell blazing to earth.

Meanwhile the British pilot, though unhurt, was unable to control his machine. Luckily the fighter was of a stable type, and continued flying level straight ahead. The observer was wounded, blood was pouring down his leg, and he was growing faint. Altogether things looked bad for the two of them.

Through the clouding brain of the observer flashed the thought that if he could only hold out he could probably save the aeroplane and both their lives. He took a piece of cord from his pocket and wound it tightly around his leg, twisting it tighter by means of a pencil. Gradually the bleeding stopped, and he made the improvised tourniquet secure. Then he turned his attention to the machine.

In the rack beside him was a spare control lever, kept for occasions like this. He took it from its place and placed it in the socket to which were attached the elevator controls. He had never piloted a machine, but knew roughly the movements to be gone through, and fortunately they had plenty of height in which to recover in case he made a false move. The pilot

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turned round and encouraged him, making signs as to what action he should take. Then the observer pressed the rudder bar, moved the control lever to one side, and the huge machine responded. It was a very bad turn, flat and sweeping. Once the machine commenced to stall, but obeying the motion of the pilot he put down the nose and corrected the flight. Then she commenced to spin, slowly at first, then faster and faster. Again he obeyed the pilot, centralised the rudder, and at last pulled her out of the dive.

From this point it was all plain sailing. The machine was pointed in the direction of home and would carry herself there if left alone. They were some ten miles over the line, and the wind was against them, but gradually the powerful engine pulled them nearer and nearer home. The trenches were crossed at an altitude of about five thousand feet, and as soon as open country was below them the pilot leaned over and throttled back the engine, the machine dropping her nose of her own accord, and gliding earthwards.

It was useless to think of reaching the aerodrome, but plenty of open space was beneath them. When they were some thirty

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feet off the ground the pilot motioned to hold her up, and as they dropped closer and closer he noticed the observer's face becoming paler and grey with pain. The tourniquet on his leg had moved, and the blood was flowing again. With a great effort he pulled himself together, and obeyed the pilot by pulling in the control lever a little more. The aeroplane answered to his touch and flattened out in time. Just as the wheels touched ground the pilot reached out his arm and switched off the engine. The force of the impact caused the machine to bounce into the air, descending with a bump and another bounce. Gradually she slowed up on the grass, and finally came to rest in safety.

Out jumped the pilot to look to his friend. The observer had fainted from loss of blood, but at the touch of the pilot's hand he opened his eyes and smiled.

"Got you here all right, old man."

Then he paused, and a spasm of pain made his face twitch.

"Damn the blighter," he murmured, as he went off again.

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THE TYRO

WHEN the pilot was ordered to go up and force down a certain balloon which was much too active in ranging some of the German guns on to one of our tenderest spots, he thought it would be a matter of flying over the line, firing a burst of bullets, and seeing the balloon go down in flames. Then he would return to his aerodrome and count one to his score of victims —for this was his first job. Unfortunately, he had reckoned without "Archie," not to mention the machine-guns which occasionally make such a nuisance of themselves from the ground, for the Hun knows that a balloon is a tempting target, and that aeroplanes can easily be enticed to attack it. He makes his preparations accordingly by strewing the ground below with machine-guns and training anti-aircraft guns on to the area about the balloon, so that the unfortunate machine which attacks has to pass through an inferno of fire.

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At the time the pilot did not know this and gave little thought to any possible danger as he climbed into his machine, and soon afterwards crossed the lines. He could easily see the "sausage" straining against its cable, looking fat and unwieldy in the air, and offering a large and tempting target. It was an excellent objective for him to blood himself on. Then "Archie" coughed, and the air became covered with floating patches of brown and white smoke. This was the first time he had been shelled, and the shelling was good. Bursts came all round him. How he escaped damage in the first few moments it is impossible to say, for he was far too astonished to make any effort to avoid the shells, but just carried on through the inferno of shrapnel and high explosive.

It was a large piece of shell case which hurtled through the plane, tearing a jagged hole in the fabric and causing a broken splinter from the main spar to graze his face, that brought him to his senses. Then, as he wiped the blood from his eyes, he remembered vaguely having once heard someone say that it took the "Archie" gunner fifteen seconds to take a sight, so that if the pilot dodged every fifteen seconds

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he would be fairly safe except from stray shots. Acting on this ancient piece of advice he dodged and twisted, zoomed and dived, striving to throw the gunners off the scent, and ever drawing nearer to the kite-balloon. As he closed with his target the machine-gunners took up the tale. Twice he heard bullets whistle past his ear, but no damage was done. And then the balloon came within range.

Seeing that he was determined to pass the screen of fire at all costs, the observers in the basket of the "sausage" signalled to those below to haul down. They were, however, too late in their resolve, for the pilot dived at them, fired a burst of bullets, and zoomed above the envelope. One burst was enough. The balloon burst into flames, and the observers jumped overboard, trusting to their parachutes to carry them to safety.

As the flaming gas-bag swayed earthwards the pilot, elated with his success, circled round and round watching the burning mass subside. If he had acted sensibly, and, his work done, made all haste for home, probably all would have been well, but regardless of the fire from below he stayed to watch. He asked for trouble and he got

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it. A well-aimed shot hit him fairly in the buttock, caught the bone, splintered it, and passed out of his thigh. For a moment he lost control of his machine, and it spun down to within two hundred feet of the ground. Then he pulled himself together, gritted his teeth, and righted the scout. He was still facing the balloon, which was now burning to an end on the ground, when he fainted.

After a few minutes, during which he seemed to live through years of his life, the pilot began to come to. At first he could not grasp the situation, but a shell-burst under the plane soon reminded him of all that had happened, and he roused himself and looked about. The pain was intense, and he was bleeding freely, but as he pulled himself together, recognised that his machine was flying level and still travelling into German country. Also, he was still being shelled. Painfully he swung the machine until she faced west, and then a red mist came before his eyes, and once more he fainted.

When next he recovered consciousness he heard a noise as of cheering, and looking down he saw the trenches under him. With an effort he retained his senses long enough

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to throttle back the engine and glide the short distance to earth. He saw a shell-pocked field in front of him, and then he fainted once more.

Next time he recovered he was lying in a white bed in hospital, and instead of the noise of guns and cheering he heard a soft voice say " Drink this."

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FINDING PILOTS

FOUR hundred eager-faced boys sat in the Speech Room awaiting the arrival of the attraction of the evening—an officer of the Royal Air Force.

They had not long to wait, and he stepped on to the platform, clad in the uniform of the old R.N.A.S., now merged in the R.A.F. The lecturer was young, and he wore the ribbon of the Distinguished Service Cross—the sign of his success in carrying out long bombing raids. So youthful did this officer look, despite his decoration and the rank of Captain, that his audience at once felt at home. Indeed, had he been out of uniform he might easily have been one of them. His youth was one of his great advantages. He had come to attract candidates for the Royal Air Force, and the youths just leaving school were the best material in the world from which to find pilots. It was obvious that the boys in the Speech Room were thinking that if one

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so young could so soon achieve distinction and gain promotion they could do likewise. Consequently the lecture started with good feeling all round.

Standing alone on the platform the speaker spoke of the work of the air, the raids on Germany, the damage done to docks and camps, and then told his audience that he would take them with him on a bomb raid to one of the German strongholds. He was well fitted to speak of his subject, for he had dropped some twenty tons of bombs himself, had carried out one of the longest raids ever attempted, was one of the first to fly a Handley-Page bomber, and had raided the towns on the Rhine.

And he kept his word. He did not merely tell them of a bomb raid; he took them with him. Mounted on a chair he described the departure from the aerodrome, and as the audience ascended into the sky they felt the darkness around them, and saw the twinkle of lights far below. Then the bombardment started as they penetrated the defences of the German lines. All around them the shells burst until at last the twinkling lights of Bruges, the target to-night, shone out ahead and the bomber prepared for action. Climbing into the

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cockpit of the huge machine he sighted the docks, and pulled the bomb lever. One by one the loads of explosives burst on the wharves and ships below. One heavy explosion showed that an ammunition dump had been hit, and then out of the darkness came showers of "Archie" and "Flaming Onions," the green balls of fire so dreaded by all machines which come within their reach.

Her work accomplished the machine swung round, steered once more through the barrage of shell-fire, and returned to the aerodrome. Every town, every battery was seen in the moonlight, but the bomber landed safely and——

There stood the lecturer—as youthful as ever. No one would dream that he and his audience had just raided one of the strongest German positions.

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FIRE IN THE AIR

THE pilot chuckled as he watched the result of his shoot. The guns which he had directed had got fairly on to the mark, and the hostile battery was obscured in the dust and smoke of bursting shells, through which the flashes of shrapnel gleamed faintly. As the air cleared he saw that the work was good and that that particular battery would not fire again. Then he turned for home.

It was at this moment that he first became aware of the presence of a rapidly nearing German fighter on mischief bent. His machine was built for artillery work, not fighting, but as there seemed no chance of his getting off without a combat, unless he deliberately put down his nose and bolted for home, he prepared to receive the Hun.

In the nature of things, the combat was bound to be one-sided, consequently the pilot of the British machine was not surprised to find that the Hun was getting

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the better of things. Holes appeared in the planes, one bullet cut through his leather coat without damaging him, and finally a shot pierced the petrol tank, the fuel gushed out over the hot engine, and a moment later the whole machine was in flames.

At this time the earth was some eight thousand feet below, and the lines about three miles away. The Hun, satisfied with his work, left the spot, and the pilot of the British machine had to decide on his action. There was a remote chance of getting down alive, so he pushed down the nose of the aeroplane, diving her as steeply as possible, whilst he fumbled for the fire extinguisher.

Then, with the control lever in one hand and fire extinguisher balanced on his knee, and controlled by the other hand, he commenced to fight for his life. The spray from the extinguisher, directed on the flames which blew back from the engine, partly overcame the conflagration and diminished the heat of the fire. Gradually the longerons were eaten into, gradually the flames crept farther and farther back. The fabric remained undamaged for a time; then it too began to disappear before the fire. Would the fuselage char through, causing the remains to drop to earth in pieces before a

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landing could be made ? Would the fabric on the planes be licked off the ribs and leave the fuselage without any means of support ? Would the flames reach himself, and cause him to die in torment ? These and similar thoughts flashed through the pilot's mind as he descended.

The trenches were easily crossed, but the earth was still some distance below, and the flames gained rapidly, despite his efforts with the extinguisher. Closer crept the ground as the wind shrieked through the wires ; louder roared the flames in their race for the pilot's life.

But the pilot won. Earth was only a few feet below him when he flattened out. The strain of the change of position was too much for the weakened longerons, and the machine snapped in pieces. The pilot was thrown clear of the wreckage, shaken, bruised, scorched, but otherwise unhurt.

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A SECOND LIFE

A PIERCED petrol tank often means fire and death; it always means an engine failure.

During a contact patrol the two-seater was attacked by four Fokker biplanes. As the Huns dived out of the sky the pilot swung round his machine to face them, and as they came within range the observer drew a bead on the leader of the formation, pressed the trigger of his gun, saw the bullets strike around the German pilot, and a moment later the scout fell into a steep dive, and spun rapidly to crash on the ground beneath.

Whilst this was happening, brief though the combat was, the three other Fokkers had not been idle. The slower British machine was riddled with bullet holes, rents appeared in the fabric of the planes and broken ribs peered jaggedly through the holes. Then a bullet struck the petrol tank, the pressure dropped at once, and

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the propeller ceased to revolve. The pilot pushed down the nose of his machine and glanced hopelessly at the observer. There appeared nothing to do but glide down and be taken prisoner, if indeed another shot did not set the machine on fire or a well-placed burst cause the planes to collapse.

The observer was, however, equal to the emergency. Once before, not long previously, an officer of his squadron had plugged a pierced tank and enabled the engine to pick up and carry the plane home. That machine was not being attacked by three German scouts still firing rapidly in the hope of destroying the already damaged aeroplane, but the observer determined, none the less, to repeat the performance.

Leaving his seat, he clambered out on to the plane, and holding fast to the struts of the diving machine, with bullets from the three Huns whistling around him, he coolly took his handkerchief and rammed it home into the hole in the tank. He nodded to the pilot, who dived the machine still more steeply, then switched on, pumping furiously at the pressure. The propeller revolved, and with a roar the engine picked up.

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Once more the pilot swung round the aeroplane and faced his aggressors. Once more a well-aimed burst went home, and a second Fokker went down, smoke and flames pouring from the fuselage.

The observer remained standing on the plane, holding on for life as the machine banked and twisted while the pilot fought his foes. It was impossible to move from his position without being thrown into space.

And then the remaining Huns fled. A machine which could recover as that one had done was not to be lightly treated. Half of their number had already been destroyed; the other half sought safety. Then the observer returned to his seat, and the aeroplane crossed the lines and landed safely at the aerodrome.

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HARASSING THE HUNS

FIGURES speak. I therefore propose to give a few figures to show what has been accomplished by the Royal Air Force recently in doing its share of bringing Germany to her knees.

At the beginning of the war, as is well known, we only possessed about 100 aircraft of all types, and considerably under 2,000 men. At the present time the R.A.F. alone destroys more German machines in a week than Britain owned altogether at the outbreak of war. In other words, over 100 German aeroplanes a week are accounted for by our airmen. One month showed 518 enemy machines down, or 129 a week, whilst our losses for the same period came to only 128 aeroplanes. That is to say, Germany lost more machines in a week than we did in a month.

Another way of showing the huge increase of the Air Force is that it can be stated that every few days we add to our resources

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as much as the total number of machines held when war broke out.

So much for the actual aeroplanes. A few figures as to the number and weight of bombs dropped, the number of rounds of machine-gun ammunition used, and the number of photographs taken may be considered.

During one month alone—all the figures given are for a month unless it is stated differently—853 tons of bombs were dropped on military objectives behind the lines. These bombs were of all weights; tiny twenty pounders to giants of two hundred and fifty pounds and more. They were dropped on trenches, stations, railways, ammunition dumps, bridges, convoys, troops on the march, billets—everywhere where they could be of use. They were not dropped on hospitals or defenceless towns. Aerodromes and docks were large sufferers, and a considerable amount of damage was done to the batteries and defences of the Belgian coast. In the same period 74 separate raids were made into Germany itself, the Rhine towns and huge munition factories being bombed time after time. It was no unusual thing for British airmen to carry out three raids into Germany in one day.

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Contrast this with the Zeppelin and Gotha raids in England. What Germany did in four years we more than accomplished in one month.

Recently papers have stated frequently that German troops have been heavily fired upon from the air, and many casualties inflicted. In a month practically 1,000,000 (a million) rounds of machine-gun ammunition have been fired from the air at ground targets. This does not take into account the many hundreds of thousands of rounds fired by airmen when fighting in the air, but refers only to shots directed against troops and targets on the ground. Bodies of troops on the march have been scattered, tired men in the trenches have been attacked, convoys have been upset, staff cars have been overturned in ditches, trains have been held up, and thousands of casualties have been inflicted on the enemy by this means alone.

Then photography. Modern warfare calls for knowledge of exact details of the enemy's system of defence, his movements, the results of bombardments. Here again the airman comes in, and sailing far behind the lines records the ground exactly as it is, with every detail of gun-emplacement or new trench showing on the photograph, and

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even the machine-gun nests in the trenches plainly visible. Over 40,000 photographs were taken in one month, all exposed over the German lines, and revealing the secret systems of defence, and showing more plainly than any report the damage done by our gun-fire.

Next may be considered the co-operation of aeroplanes with heavy guns. In these days of long-range fire the gunners, even with well-established forward observation posts, cannot see the effect of their own fire, neither can they direct the shots accurately. This is where the airman can help. Poised thousands of feet in the air he can see the result of every shot fired, and signal down corrections to the gunners. By this means countless German batteries have been either wiped out or compelled to retire. Work of this nature is going on every day, and the figures are so huge as to be almost incredible to those not intimately acquainted with the work of the Royal Air Force.

Behind the lines the same tremendous activity prevails. At one Motor Transport Repair Park alone 1,000 hands are working night and day on the repair of lorries, tenders, touring cars, motor-cycles, and the other necessaries for the Royal Air Force.

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At other depots men labour incessantly on the repair of slightly damaged aeroplanes, overhauling machine-guns, repairing cameras, and attending to the many minor ailments to which the paraphernalia of the air is liable.

Bearing these figures in mind—and the Hun knows them as well as we do—is it any wonder that the Germans are trembling in their shoes and impotently curse the R.A.F. for the work that it is carrying out ?

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McCUDDEN, V.C.

WHEN I first met McCudden he was in training as a pilot. At that time no one realised that he was about to become one of the leading fighters of the air, and it was not until some time after his graduation that he showed promise of his wondrous skill as an airman.

In 1910 McCudden, then a lad of fifteen, joined the Royal Engineers as a "boy," and was soon sent abroad to Egypt, where he spent most of his service in this class. On reaching the age of eighteen he enlisted as a sapper in the corps in which his father was a warrant officer, and a few weeks afterwards transferred to the newly formed Royal Flying Corps, which had just emerged into existence from the Balloon Company, Royal Engineers.

From this time onwards McCudden applied himself to the air, and on the outbreak of war in August, 1914, was one of the original expeditionary force which left

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England on August 12th. Whilst in England he had flown frequently as an observer, and consequently was employed in that capacity on many of the early reconnaissances which were carried out. He did extremely useful work, often flying several times a day during the strenuous times of the retreat from Mons.

For his services as an observer he was sent home to learn to pilot a machine, and as soon as he graduated he returned to France once more, this time as a Flight Sergeant.

At first McCudden was not thought a more than average pilot, but possibly this was due to the fact that he was not an officer, and his retiring nature did not allow him to bring his deeds to the notice of those in authority. Also in those early days, with ill-armed and slow machines, the number of aerial victories was not nearly so great as they are now.

I well remember McCudden's first fight, or rather the account of it afterwards, when he returned to the aerodrome. Whilst on patrol, a monotonous flight backwards and forwards parallel to the lines, but on the German side of them, he had sighted a Hun returning from a reconnaissance. As

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this was just the chance he was waiting for, he left his beat and chased after the enemy. Luckily his machine was the faster of the two, and the Hun was soon overhauled and forced to fight, but McCudden gave his foe no chance, simply and literally making rings round him, and pouring in streams of lead without giving any opportunity for the enemy to get in a single shot. The Hun machine soon stalled, side-slipped, and fell to earth in a spin, where it crashed on our side of the lines. McCudden then returned to his patrol.

For this exploit he was awarded the Military Medal some time afterwards, and also commissioned in recognition of his services.

He fought all through the Fokker scare of 1916, and on at least three occasions fought duels with Immelmann, the renowned German Fokker pilot. All these duels were indecisive, as indeed so many fights between equals in the air are bound to be, and on each occasion both fighters manœuvred and fired until all their ammunition was spent, and they had perforce to return to their aerodromes. McCudden was most anxious to account for the German star, especially as on the occasion of one of his duels he returned

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with a badly perforated plane to show as a record of his combat. His wish was not realised, for shortly afterwards Immelmann fell a victim to a pilot of a neighbouring squadron, who curiously enough bore the almost identical name of McCubbin.

The Military Medal was the forerunner of many honours, and some three months later McCudden, now a Second Lieutenant, was awarded the Military Cross for his services in bringing down enemy machines. Then the honours commenced to fall thick upon him ; first the bar to the Military Cross, then the Distinguished Service Order, and then the bar to the D.S.O. ; all were won within the next few months. He was also awarded the Croix de Guerre by the French Republic.

Even in Egypt, where the writer was then stationed, news of his exploits filtered through, and when at last a pilot arrived who was familiar with the doings of the new hero of the Corps he was besieged with questions. The writer was frankly astonished, for though, in England and France, he had recognised in McCudden a good pilot, he had not expected him to reach such heights of fame.

The early part of 1918 saw the culmin-

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ating point in his career, and he was awarded the V.C., not for any particular deed, but because of the general excellence and heroism of his work. At this time he had brought down an official fifty-four machines, and in all probability these victories could be almost doubled without exceeding the true number. McCudden himself, one of the most modest of men, claimed to have shot down far more than fifty-four. When I last spoke to him in the R.F.C. club in London, he stated that he thought he could truthfully lay claim to seventy-nine Huns.

Though an excellent patrol leader, McCudden preferred to fly on his own scout machine, just looking for any German who would stay to fight him. Frequently, after what would be to the average pilot a fair day's work, he would place fresh belts of ammunition in his machine and fly out over the lines alone. He was a deadly shot, and had an almost uncanny knack of making the most of any disguise which might be obtained from low clouds or even from the colour of the ground below. His favourite method of attack was to remain in the clouds until his victim was within reach, and then dash out to fight. He would as readily attack a formation as a

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single machine, and having once secured his favourite spot would pour in bursts of fire until the Hun machine broke to pieces in the air or blazed into flame. It was almost an impossibility to out-manœuvre him; the only safety lay in rapid flight or a quick spiral to the ground.

On one occasion he went out from the aerodrome at about ten o'clock in the morning, and within an hour and a half had shot down three machines and used all his ammunition. He thereupon returned to the aerodrome, obtained another machine, as his own was slightly damaged by a few stray shots in one of the early fights, and went out again, shooting down yet another Hun before he returned for lunch.

For the last few months McCudden had been instructing at one of the Schools of Aerial Fighting in Scotland, near to which Bishop, the last survivor of the three airmen to win the triple distinction, was employed in similar work.

Like all great men, McCudden was not content to stay at home and instruct; his heart was overseas, sixteen thousand feet in the air with his beloved scout. At last his repeated applications to return to France were acceded to; he was promoted

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Major, and appointed to the command of a squadron. His way to France was by air; the journey across was safely made and he landed at a depot to learn his precise destination. When he received the news that he was to return to that part of the line which he had made feared by the Huns, he again entered his scout to finish the journey. Whether it was pure light-heartedness at the prospect of more active service—which seems more likely than that the machine had developed a defect—or carelessness on the part of the pilot remains unknown, but on leaving the aerodrome McCudden indulged in various stunts at a low altitude, always a dangerous proceeding, even for the most experienced pilot. Suddenly the machine was seen to dive to earth, and before the pilot had time to recover control, he was killed. Probably if only McCudden had climbed to a higher altitude before giving way to his expressions of delight, the accident would not have occurred.

He was only twenty-three when he died, and of these few years he had given eight to his country, made his name feared by the German Air Service, won the love of his brother pilots, and gained the highest distinction which a man can achieve.

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AIRSHIPS OF THE NIGHT

BRITISH airships operate against the Huns by day and by night. Those of Germany only operate under cover of darkness; very rarely does the Boche send one of his precious Zeppelins out in daylight. He prefers to reserve their energies for bombing towns at night when he thinks he will have a fair chance of the ships returning to their hangars. His hopes are sometimes frustrated by the men who guard the air about our coasts by day and by night.

There is just this difference between British and German airships. Whereas the Hun uses his for raiding purposes almost entirely, with just an occasional reconnaissance flight, our lighter-than-air vessels are used for a multitude of purposes, reconnaissance, escort work, and submarine strafing being among the most common.

The Zeppelin which puts its nose over the North Sea is sure of a warm reception these days. Rarely does it attempt to go

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far from home. When it does, disaster follows.

The alarm that Zeppelins were about only reached the aerodrome as the pilots were about to turn in after an early mess. The orderly who went round the quarters warning certain pilots and observers for duty took a considerable time over his job, and half an hour elapsed before the little body of men assembled in the C.O.'s office to receive their orders and hear all that was known about the position and probable objectives of the raiders. A little later the sound of running engines was heard from the aerodrome, and as the C.O. walked out into the night the first of the machines left the ground and rose into the air.

Night flying is an art of its own. Many most excellent day pilots are not of the least use when sent into the air at night. The whole atmosphere seems different. The clear cut horizon of a fine day is indiscernible, the ground below shows faintly through the darkness. Streams and ponds shine like burnished silver, and the shadowy outlines of roads and houses serve but to confuse the pilot unaccustomed to the dark. When rising and landing, objects rise up with startling suddenness, the ground appears

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from nowhere, giving the unaccustomed pilot but scant time to flatten out, and things generally are confusing to the last degree.

The first pilot to leave the ground circled in a wide sweep around the aerodrome, for until a certain height has been reached it is next to impossible to locate any position. With height comes a certain clarity of definition, even on the least moonlight nights. Once he was able to find his bearings, the pilot swung round the machine, and steered steadily for the direction from which he expected the raiders to approach. A pale moon, just in its first quarter, emerged from the clouds as he swept eastwards, as though to aid him in his search. One by one the other aeroplanes left the aerodrome and followed him up into the night.

For some time he flew backwards and forwards, gaining height and listening intently whilst straining his eyes into the darkness to catch the first glimpse of the invader. He was an old night pilot, one of the first to join that "Zepp-strafing" squadron, but as yet he had not had the good fortune to come within range of one of the monster airships. This trip he meant

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to atone for his bad luck if it were at all possible.

At last, in an interval when he had throttled back his engine in order that he might hear better, he discerned the deep hum of German engines. The noise seemed to come from straight ahead, and he carried on his course, fingering his gun lovingly, and staring into the blackness. At last he saw a long shape moving through the night. He jammed on a drum of ammunition and prepared for action.

The searchlights picked up the raider almost at the same moment as the pilot. Long fingers of light pried into the night, and disks of light fastened themselves on the moving Zeppelin. The huge monster writhed and dipped, trying to escape the betraying beams. Then shells commenced to burst, and for a while the waiting aeroplane was unable to come within range of the airship, because of the intensity of the shell-fire. Puffs of smoke, hurling out shrapnel and high explosive, filled the air, bursting below, above, and around the doomed airship. For a time the pilot watched, fascinated, waiting for the lucky burst which would end the career of the monster. The bombardment continued, but

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the airship, putting up her nose, rose rapidly into the darkness, reached the shelter of a friendly cloud, and vanished out of the beams of the searchlights. The pilot cursed himself for waiting so long, and then followed into the clouds.

The average Zeppelin can rise much faster than an aeroplane, and when the pilot finally emerged from a thick, damp layer of mist the airship was nowhere to be seen. Vainly he hunted backwards and forwards, now throttling back his engine to listen the better, then zigzagging across the sky, straining his eyes into the dark. After nearly an hour of this he gave up in despair, and again dived into the clouds. On once more reaching clear air he witnessed a sight which he was never likely to forget.

A few hundred feet below him lay the Zeppelin, and almost as he appeared a shell burst right on the stern of the vessel. For a moment nothing happened, though the airship staggered in her flight. Then a sheet of red fire arose, and ran rapidly down the length of the vessel. For a while she stood sharply silhouetted in flames against the sky, then her nose dropped, and she plunged to earth, the flames roaring in a deep note as she fell. The pilot watched,

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enthralled. The heat from the burning mass rose about him as he watched the descent. Then he throttled back his engine and returned to the aerodrome, happy, yet disappointed at missing the luck, to report what he had seen.

No sooner had he landed than a crowd of waiting mechanics ran out to inquire what was the matter.

"Matter?" he queried. "What's the point of staying up when the blighter has been strafed?"

An officer who had joined the crowd gently explained that though one Zeppelin had been brought down in flames, the whole German air fleet had not been wiped out. There were at least three other ships at large over the country.

Even as he spoke the boom of exploding bombs came to the ears of the pilot, and he made haste to fill his petrol tanks, and set out on his quest once more. Again he sped upwards through the night, heading steadily in the direction whence had come the sound of bombs. He soon saw the silvery fingers of the searchlights piercing the night, and the flashes of exploding shells. Once more he was doomed to disappointment, for as he sighted a long dark

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shape in the sky, the anti-aircraft guns ceased fire, and several aeroplanes appeared, dodging in and out of the beams of light. The pilot saw faint flashes as his companions poured volleys of bullets into the fabric of the airship, and, before he could approach and join in the fray, for the second time that night he saw the flames eat down the framework of the Zeppelin, and again a huge monster sank blazing to earth, lighting up the sky and the figures of the attacking, victorious midgets as it fell.

The pilot turned away disgusted. Not even allowed a share in the destruction of the second machine, although he was first off the ground, he felt very sick with things in general. Then he had an inspiration. There were two other airships in the neighbourhood. By this time they would probably have dropped their bombs, and seeing the fate which had overtaken their companions be making all haste home. The pilot swung round and steered east, out to sea, determined to fly on until he overtook or cut off the raiders, and then attack them single-handed without companions or even the help of the searchlights.

For a time he flew on through the night without seeing or hearing any sign of the

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raiders. At last, faintly looming ahead, he saw two shapes, flying side by side some thousand feet apart. Doubtless the Zeppelin commanders were congratulating themselves on having escaped the doom of their comrades, and were now feeling safe. The pilot approached unseen until he was some two hundred yards from the nearest ship. Then the beam of a searchlight shone out from the rear car of one of the airships, questing about for the suspicious noise that had been heard by the operator. The pilot kept out of sight until he had reduced the distance. Then, careless of the result, he came close beside the Zeppelin, and pressed the trigger of his gun. In the excitement of the moment his aim was bad. The bullets sang through the air between the forward and centre cars, doing no damage, but betraying his position to the Huns. Instantly an inferno of fire was directed upon the aeroplane. Every gun on both airships was brought to bear on the attacking machine. Bullets whistled through the planes, making threads of light in the darkness. The deeper note of the light gun mounted on top of the gas-bag sounded from time to time. As the pilot swung round to attack again, both airships put up their noses to try and

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outclimb their attacker. The powerful engines roared, and the ships shot up almost perpendicularly. Once more the pilot saw his prey escaping, for the aeroplane could not hope to compete successfully in the matter of climb. Frantically he pushed up the nose of his aeroplane after the retreating Huns, vainly endeavouring to overhaul them. As a last effort he aimed steadily at the stern of one of the vessels, and fired a long burst. His shots must have been successful, for the nose dropped, and the ship fell into an almost horizontal position.

It was a matter of only a few moments for the aeroplane to reach the level of its foe. The second ship had vanished in the clouds, and left its companion to its fate. The pilot settled down to his work with a smile of satisfaction. Now he felt sure of the victory. Time after time he poured in burst after burst of bullets. Many hit the envelope, but it failed to ignite. As a last resort he climbed above the airship, exposing himself to the fire from the gun mounted on the top, flew low over the structure, and dropped a bomb. Fairly amidships fell the load of explosive. A roar, and a sheet of flame rent the air. The Zeppelin doubled up like a knife, and

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blazing from stem to stern, fell slowly to the sea below. The pilot watched it fall, forgetful of its companion. Hissing loudly it hit the water. Gradually the flames subsided, and the wreckage sank, the aeroplane circling above, watching it to the end.

Then the pilot turned once more, his work and ambition accomplished, flew close above the sea back to the coast, and, as the first signs of dawn lit the sky, landed, weary but triumphant on the aerodrome. He had been the first to ascend, and he was the last to return.

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CRASHES

"WHY don't they take more care to investigate these matters?" is a remark frequently heard when an account of an aeroplane crashing at home is seen in the papers. The matter *is* investigated thoroughly, and this is what occurs.

When news of a crash in which the pilot is seriously injured or killed comes through, the C.O. of his squadron immediately sends wires to the headquarters of the Group and Area, to the Air Ministry, and if necessary to the pilot's next of kin. If the cause of the accident is not absolutely obvious, another wire is sent to a particular department—the Accidents Department—of the Air Ministry, asking that a specially qualified, unbiased officer may be sent down to inspect the remains of the machine, and report whether the accident was due to bad workmanship, faulty design, or carelessness on the part of a mechanic when overhauling the machine (a very rare fault

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this), or to any other discoverable cause. Until this officer has made his investigation, the machine remains exactly where it fell, in order that he may have every chance to arrive at some useful conclusion.

After his inspection a Court of Enquiry is assembled, "to inquire into and report upon the circumstances under which machine No. —— was damaged, and the pilot was seriously injured."

The court usually consists of a Major or senior Captain as President, with two other officers as members. They then proceed to take evidence.

The first witness is usually the officer who ordered the flight. He states what orders he gave, and whether he thought the pilot was sufficiently experienced to carry them out. Next, the injured pilot's instructor—if he was a pupil under instruction—appears, and states what experience the pilot had, what types of machines he had flown, and how much air time he had done. Thirdly the pilot who last flew the aeroplane before the accident states whether the machine had any faults when he flew it. Then the mechanics who attended to the rigging of the aeroplane and the overhauling of the engine state when the controls,

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etc., were last examined, and what condition they were in. The Medical Officer gives evidence as to the injuries sustained by the pilot, and any witnesses of the accident state what happened.

This concludes the evidence, and the court then considers the various statements, and finally makes a report as to what, in its opinion, was the cause of the accident. It also states whether or not the pilot was on duty at the time, and if anyone is to blame in any way.

Finally the proceedings pass through the Wing, Group and Area, and the C.O.s and G.O.C. state whether they agree or not with the finding of the court. Eventually the report reaches the Air Ministry, and the evidence contained therein is used, if possible, to obviate similar accidents in future.

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